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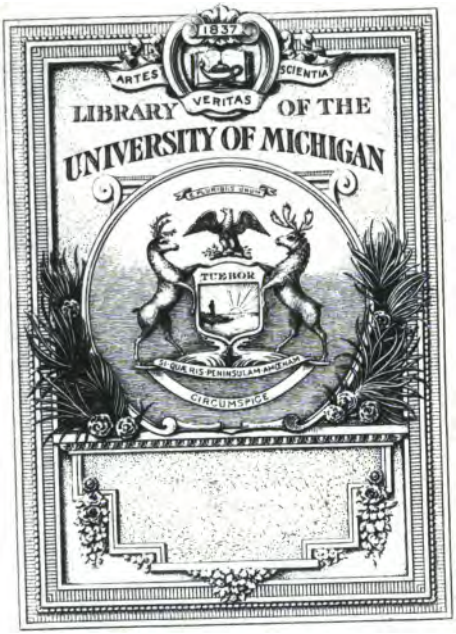
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THE CALL OF THE SURF

UNIV. OF MICH.

"Out from the water leapt a long gray shape."

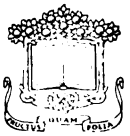
THE CALL OF THE SURF

BY

VAN CAMPEN HEILNER

AND

FRANK STICK



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TO THE LATE

HARTIE I. PHILLIPS

PIONEER IN THE SPORT OF SURF ANGLING, FRIEND AND COMPANION, WHOSE SPIRIT, THOUGH DEPARTED, STILL LIVES IN THESE PAGES, THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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AUTHORS' NOTE

THE purpose of this book is threefold: to afford some small entertainment to brother fishermen on those long evenings when the north wind howls and winter's sleet drives against the window pane; to attract the stranger to a sport in which the authors have found a vast measure of happiness, and to make somewhat smoother his trail to the Big-Sea Water.

The suggestions in regard to tackle and equipment are offered in no spirit of dogmatism, and they are authoritative only to the extent that they have brought a full share of success to their exponents.

It is the belief of the authors that this, the first book to be published on surf fishing, is but the forerunner of other volumes dealing with a sport which grows in popularity each day, and which owes its attraction as much to the grandeur and the inspirational appeal of environment as to the wonderful fishing which it affords.

Of the twelve chapters contained in this volume, I, III, V, IX, XI, and XII were written by Mr. Stick, Chapters II, IV, VI, VII, VIII, and X by Mr. Heilner.

THE SPIRIT OF THE ANGLER

I hear the call of wild surf ringing in my ears,
I see the wind-swept beaches and the grass-crowned dunes;
I see the velvet marshes stretching far away,
I hear the pine trees chant their sombre tunes.

I see the salt wrack sweeping o'er the lonely beach,
My senses are athrill with salt-sweet, briny air;
I feel the surge and rush of ever-changing tides,
And the caress of sand blown through my hair.

I see an angler standing waist deep in the tide
As sunset shadows o'er the lonely sand dunes creep,
And e'en the restless ocean seems in breathless calm
Like the great soul of Nature lulled in sleep.

Like smoke wreaths rising from the funeral pyres of gods,
I see the clouds high-banked against the western sky,
And softly, like the call of dying memory,
I hear the lonely gray gull's far-off cry.

PHILIP ARNOLD LA VIE.

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American Angler, *Field and Stream*, *Motor Boat*, *National Sportsman*, *Sports Afield*, *Outers-Recreation*, New York *Sun*.

For the use of photographs and many helpful suggestions the authors are desirous of expressing their appreciation to John F. Seger, G. A. Lyon, Leonard Hulit, William T. Smith, Rowland Hazard, and to many others.

FOREWORD

You have been on the beach on one of those delightful September afternoons when the whitest of great clouds fly fast and high into the east, when the deep blue of the heavens' vault blazes between them and the clearest of atmospheres shows every faint shading of the dunes; when the clean beach is at its whitest, and the whole scene quivers with the vast beauty of a solitude in which you are exultingly at home. You have beheld the low seas racing shoreward over shoal after shoal in glistening whitecaps as far as the eye could reach. You have seen their tops, combed off by the stiff west wind, streaming backward, sparkling and dazzlingly white.

Such a day it probably was when the first surf angler made his cast and stood, in silent awe, drinking in the glories of the great day that came whirling up over him out of the east and went rolling down into the west.

It was then that a joyous band of merry sprites seized his line, and, stretching it to its full length, described before his astonished gaze the

Magic Circle of the Surf Cast, with the tip of his own crude rod as its very centre.

With hand cupped to ear he harkened to their wonderful song:

We welcome you to the Borders of our Realm.

We shall give you great joy.

Your eyes shall behold beauties unseen of others.

We have chosen you of men to spread the glad tidings of the Sea, and only our own chosen ones shall hear you and understand.

Yours shall be the hiss and the roar of the wild seas that sweep over the flat, and their boom as they roll out of the hole and break upon the sands.

Yours shall be the dull, gray, seething breakers that drive the flora of our homes high upon the wet beach when the storm winds come bellowing out of the east.

And yours it shall be to revel in those storms and go forth, lightheartedly, into their rage.

And, when Neptune's mood changes and the skies brighten, it shall be yours to see the green flora awaken from its sleep and dreaming, and go gaily before the gentle breeze for another voyage.

We shall give you the finny wonders of the deep to thrill your blood. And the thrills we give shall be greater than the Naides of the Brooks give their lovers, for we are of the Sea, vaster by a thousand times than their Realm.

The graceful gull, the shore birds, the pink sea shells, the sunrise coming over the edge of the world, the placid days of summer and the long, soft, moonlit nights of autumn are yours. So, too, are the wild, black, wet, howling nights when dunes shift, and bars and cuts are levelled.

Yours shall be the joy of discovering new cuts and flats in their formative stages, and of watching them from tide to tide as they grow.

We shall teach you to love the salt Sea and to respect.

You shall stand at the centre of Nature's most sublime canvas with a multi-hued autumnal sunset on your right hand and a golden moonrise on your left! The round of the day that stretches into the misty distances and of the night that draws its darkness close about, you shall spend in the solitude of the beaches, and be unafraid. You shall rejoice in all the varied moods of the Great Sea, and take to yourself the satisfying qualities of its strenuity and persistence.

Our lovers shall be the friends of your heart.

We shall reward your efforts with better and still better tools of the craft.

And the great truth shall come to you, that as civilization, year by year, drains the land and the land-locked waters of their wild life, the incomprehensible reservoir of life in the Sea is there to give you more and more of joy and thrills as your worthiness warrants; and you shall perceive clearly why the rod of the Sea Angler is to be the last implement of the chase to remain in the hands of man.

For such are the alluring promises and inspirations of the surf. They hold the surf angler to his pursuit when the June skies are fresh and bright with the life of youth, and when the November storms make all a smother of spume and wild uproar as Aeolus and Neptune clash in rage.

Then, ho! for the adventure!

SWITCH REEL.

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THE CALL OF THE SURF

THE CALL OF THE SURF

CHAPTER I

SURF FISHING

GAME and fish are fast disappearing as our remoter sections become settled, as lakes and bayous are drained, and I have been assured that the time is not far distant when we will have degenerated into a race of stoop-shouldered, anæmic creatures, fit only for such mild recreative pastimes as bridge whist contests and pink teas. But I dislike to harbour the thought, and I do not believe it, not for a minute. I would hate to think of my children, and of my children's children being deprived of those healthful, zestful, and entirely innocent recreations which have been such a big matter in my own life, and which have done much to make this very earthly sphere of ours such an entirely satisfactory dwelling place.

True, a good day's shooting, or a fair catch of trout or of bass, nowadays entails the expenditure of considerable time and money, to the city dweller at least, yet am I buoyed up by the knowl-

edge that one form of sport exists, and with a bit of sane supervision will remain to the sportsmen of the country, and to their descendants for as long as the ocean rolls and its waves beat upon our shores.

The lovers of salt-water angling are legion. Each day of the season fishermen venture seaward from every sizeable town and city along our coasts to dabble with short rods and with hand lines on the offshore banks. If the weather be fair, your shipmates companionable, and your skipper a man of tact and of discretion, this boat fishing is good sport I grant you, but there is better to be had by those who remain behind, providing they know how. Better so far as environment and methods are concerned, and under average conditions, better also in respect to the size and quality of the catch. You will still have the spray in your face and the salt breeze will come sweet to your nostrils, yet the clean sand will be beneath your feet. The vasty deep will roll before your eyes, and the blue sky will arch above your head. The fish you catch will glisten with brine, and the hue of the deep water will be reflected from their shimmering scales, yet storm, or wind, or rain, shall hold no terrors for you.

Surf fishing is by no means a new development of the angler's art; in fact, it is one of the oldest we

have any record of, but only of late years has it begun to achieve real popularity. No method of fishing in which I have indulged affords greater diversion, or is more productive of satisfying results. I will go further, and will say that no sport, not even the hunting of big game, has more enthralled me in those pleasurable throes of excitement, which only the outdoorman knows, than have the battles I have waged with those great and goodly fish which so frequently take into their capacious jaws the bait of the surf fisherman.

To feel the lift, the gentle mouthing, and then the irresistible tug and run of a thirty-pound channel bass; to sense the jarring rush of the striper; to see the enormous length of a shark leave the waves in headlong leap, while the line runs like water from your reel; these experiences are sufficient to send the blood pounding through the body, and to lift the sportsman into the ultimate heaven of happiness.

There is a certain individuality and fascination about this particular brand of fishing which is to be found in no other branch of the art in like degree. To the neophyte this statement may sound like an exaggeration, and one who has found his diversion in inland waters may deny it, yet does the fact remain that few who try their hand at the game but become devotees. All forms of angling are

pleasurable, to me at least, and yet their appeal may arise from entirely distinct causes. Surf fishing owes its charm to a number of easily perceived allurements, but mainly, I think, to the fact that nowhere else does the element of chance enter so strongly. One casts a fly, and he catches trout, and trout only. In bass or muskallunge fishing it is usually bass or muskallunge that come to net or to gaff, as the case may be. True, a fish of exceptional weight may gladden the heart of the fresh-water fisherman, and after all it is this chance catch which causes him so persistently to continue the sport. I knew a lake in northern Wisconsin, where one could go, supposing he knew the trail, and be assured of catching from twenty to a hundred bass in a few hours' fishing. And yet this lake was rarely visited, for the reason that no fish over two pounds' weight had ever been taken from its waters. We preferred to cast our lures in the larger lakes, where an odd bass or pike of large size might be taken.

In the surf I have captured them of a dozen species, and ranging from a kingfish no more than a pound in weight up to a thirty-five pound bass (and on the same tackle) in the space of a single tide. Once the hook is cast into the ocean, no man can say what finny fellow will venture in from the deep to inspect the bait. It may be

some dainty creature, carrying the opalescent colours of corral strands, and with a flavour to his fat sides to delight the senses of a gourmand. Or it may be some weird and rare denizen of the ocean bed, or even a great bass or drum, and not infrequently a shark, which will test the fibre of one's rod. But whatever the fish may be, they all afford good sport, and with scarcely an exception they may be eaten with a relish. No other fishing is quite so apt to bring tremendous, and even startling, results. Upon more than one occasion I have seen a sufficient number of weakfish, croakers, bluefish, and bass beached by a single rod to afford an epicurean feast to a hundred people.

As to the fighting ability of these fish that come inside the breakers—and this would be the first question asked by the average fisherman, I can assure him that there are those among them which will take out five hundred feet of line at a single rush and which, unless the angler protect his hands with thumb stall or drag, will blister the fingers that attempt to halt them. Aye, and more than once, if a man persist in the sport, will he see the last of his nine hundred feet of line disappear from his rod tip as his quarry makes a final run. There are fish in the surf which will cause the rod to jerk and quiver in the grasp as though it were beaten upon by a heavy sledge. Fish

which will take the angler half off his feet with the violence of their attack, and cause him to shout aloud in the excitement of the combat. Yes, they are worthy antagonists, these fellows of the blue water, and none need feel compassion in giving combat to them, though we may honour them for their gameness.

When I wade into the surf, and swinging the rod forward, see my weight and bait disappear beneath the water, then there comes a feeling which it is hard for me to describe. A feeling of expectation, certainly, and of hope, and yet with it, something akin to awe. I perceive the wide ocean before me, reaching to my horizon and to an infinity of other horizons beyond. The waves come rolling in, to break far out, to gain in volume and to break again at my feet. Gulls dip and swerve, and hover in their feeding, and their wild cries sound above the roar of waters. And as my eyes sweep over the scene and consider all those great creatures who dwell beneath the waves, and who even now may be investigating my bait, then, as I say, a sensation of something near to awe comes to me. I feel my own unimportance in the scheme of things, my presumption in casting this ineffective hook and slender line into the deep. There are tremendous fishes there in the water before me. Great porpoises have disported close inshore, diving and

bounding through the waves like miniature submarines. Huge, man-eating sharks there are, too, for I have both seen and felt them at the end of my line. Tuna perhaps, of a thousand pounds or more; mossy-backed sea turtles and stingarees, and a multitude of others among the kindred of the sea. I meditate upon these facts, when suddenly, as I stand, there comes a sharp jerk to my rod. I set the hook instinctively, before my conscious mind has time to switch to the problem in hand, and all sensations are swallowed up in the joys of the battle.

The fascination of our environments, the widespread ocean, changing constantly with every hour that passes, and with each slightest fluctuation in wind or tide; the wide, clean beach; the broken dunes; and the salt grass, giving to the constant breeze; and the breeze itself, which is of such importance, particularly in summer weather, these things I shall dwell upon at no great length. If you are a fisherman, and follow the call of the surf, you will come to know and to care for it all with an instinctive appreciation, such I suppose as the gray gull feels as he wheels in the wind, and blends his cry with the voice of the waters.

Many times I have been asked to express an opinion concerning the strength and agility of salt-water fish as compared to those which range in

fresh water. Time was when I might have given the preference to either the black bass or trout, figuring upon a pound-for-pound basis, and so far as regards the difficulty of bringing to gaff is concerned, the muskallunge would have been my choice. I still believe that fewer muskallunge are landed in proportion to strikes than any fish I have ever caught, with the exception of the tuna. And yet this is mainly because of the peculiar bony construction of the mouth, and the difficulty in setting a hook, and also from the fact that so many muskallunge strike on a short line. The tackle used in the pursuit of salt- and fresh-water fishes and the methods employed vary so greatly that it is hard to compare them with justice to both species. Yet I know that I have landed muskallunge of thirty pounds on a six-ounce rod, and completed the job in less than twenty minutes. Also, I have never known a fresh-water fish to force me to give more than fifty feet of line. Yet in the surf I have seen a channel bass of around thirty pounds take five hundred feet of line in a single run, and this while the fisherman checked him with all the strength of his two arms, while the twenty-eight-ounce rod fairly creaked with the strain upon it. Consider, too, the fact that the salt-water fellow battles against the force and the buffets of tide and wave as well as against heavier

tackle. Ninety per cent. of the muskallunge which are hooked are killed by dragging behind the skiff of the fisherman after the first few minutes of active battle. On the whole, I am convinced from my own observation that there are at least a dozen salt-water fishes which if hooked up in a tug of war with the best we find in fresh water, would drag them where they willed. So far as the smaller of the salt-water species are concerned, the weakfish, croakers, etc., these I grant you will make a less spectacular fight than do either bass or trout. But try the same fish on light tackle and I believe you will agree with me that there is little to choose between them, and that from a standpoint of strength and endurance, the palm must go to those denizens of the blue water, while the bluefish is unquestionably a stronger, faster, and more spectacular fighter than either the bass or trout.

I have seen a forty-pound muskallunge leap from the water and throw the spoon twenty feet with a shake of his head. But I have also seen a hundred-and-fifty-pound shark surge upward in a succession of headlong plunges, and with his huge, lithe body thresh the water into foam. I have known him to take out eight hundred feet of line, nine hundred, and to keep on going, with, so it seemed to me, his speed increasing with every sweep of his tail.

The methods employed in this surf fishing are scientific and sportsmanlike. It is not a very difficult thing to learn to cast sufficiently well to catch fish when conditions are ideal, but to cast two hundred feet or better is another matter and comes only through conscientious practice. To get one's line out with that springy snap of the rod which sends the bait and weight in a low, graceful arc; to land in the second or third line of breakers; and, above all, to handle reel and line with that degree of expertness which precludes the possibility of a backlash, this is the development not of weeks but usually of years. While the act of casting in itself is not usually either a strenuous or a violent form of exercise, still when combined with the beach tramping and wading, and the exposure to wind and to sun, and to salty spray, which is all a part of the game, it goes to form a recreation which in its health-giving qualities alone is to be seriously considered.

This fishing is not entirely a matter of casting one's bait with ease and grace, and of handling the fish when hooked with complete aplomb. No, there is a great deal more to it than that. It combines a thousand tricks and knacks of the craft, which one gathers up and stores away for future need. There is no form of fishing either that offers greater opportunity for pioneer work in

the way of discovering new methods and new applications of old principles. Each season that passes seems to bring some new fish to the attention of the surfman, or at least to suggest to him some fresh method of dealing with old acquaintances.

So far in this more or less rambling disquisition I have dealt pretty much in generalities, and probably for this very reason I have failed in giving to the reader any very clear conception of the sport. It were better, no doubt, to tell of one or two of my own expeditions in the past, when I have heard and answered the call of the surf. As I look back and conjure up some of those multitudinous pictures which the words surf fishing bring to mind, there are a half dozen or more which stand out exceedingly clear and sharp upon my mental screen. And strange to relate, these are not the red-letter days, the days of exceptional catches, but are marked rather by some untoward happening or other, or by some strange and unusual exposition of nature.

There was a blue and pearly day of autumn, when sky and water seemed to recede and merge beneath a shimmering curtain of mist, and when, as far as the eye could reach, the ocean was beaten into foam by school after school of leaping, darting beauties. There was the night of intermittent moonlight and shadow, when for hours I held the

bucking rod against the plunges of a hard-fighting shark. There was a certain evening at the Inlet, when the waves rolled mountain high, and yet our baits held for some unexplainable reason, and we made great medicine. Of these days, and of other days of exceptional happenings I might speak, but better I think, as my object is to give a general picture of the sport, to tell of the average successful day.

We had landed at the beach long after dark, and had fished the ebb tide without result, excepting for a number of barndoors, as the surfmen term the pernicious skate. The stars had gone out one by one, and when a suggestion of light along the eastern horizon proclaimed the coming day, I arose from my blankets and building a fire beneath the kettle, we had soon fortified our shivering selves with steaming coffee and sandwiches.

The old ocean heaved gently, and even this early the screams of the gulls came to us as we made our way down the beach to the point where we had left our rods the night before. The waves lapped gently against the shore, and the wide sweep of sand before us and the smooth surface of the water beyond showed us that the tide had not yet begun to swing.

Shadowy shapes flitted over the water, and now

and then the call of sleepy shore birds came to our ears. I chose my rod from the several stuck upright in their sand spikes, and baiting with a generous portion of fresh squid I made a short cast to wet the line, and then with a free swing sent the bait far out into the tide.

It seemed that I had scarce time to fit the butt into its rest when there came a tug at the line. Instinctively I set the hook and felt the plunges of a fish, which, when I had played him to the beach, proved to be a croaker of some two pounds' weight. Again I made my cast, considerably encouraged by these quick results. And now I perceived that the sky had brightened considerably. The advance guard of the gulls were flapping backward and forward across the water, now and then fluttering for an instant above the waves, as they investigated some promising disturbance beneath. The rip was beginning to make, and I moved a few feet up the beach and made another cast, which laid me close beside the line of ruffled water which extended outward from the point.

It was evident that I had taken the last of a school of night-feeding croakers, for ten minutes or better passed without the slightest touch. Several times I had lifted my rod to move the bait a few feet shoreward. Again I made this manœuvre, when instantly came a sharp strike, which all but

loosened my grasp on the reel. He had taken it on the run, and I brought the rod upward and kept him coming. More than once I was forced to ease up on my quarry, and even to give him a few feet of line as he swept back and forth along the shore, but at last I had him in the surf and a curling wave laid him at my feet. A weakfish of fully six pounds' weight the proved to be, and I held the fish up by the gills and admired the shape and the fresh colours of him. Indeed, to my mind there exists no more beautiful fish than these same weakfish when fresh from the brine. They are graceful and gamy in build, and with their bright spots and markings and the pearly, iridescent shading of back and sides they make a trophy to delight the eye.

But on this occasion I lost little time in idly admiring my catch, for now the gulls were beginning to swarm along the line of the rip, and their excited cries and gabbling encouraged the thought that fish were working in the waters beneath them.

Cutting a slender, flat strip from the belly of a mossbunker, I impaled it on my hook so that it projected below the bend, and then made a cast, and without suffering it to sink to the bottom, I worked it rapidly toward the beach. Several casts I made in this manner without result, and I

had about concluded that my own peculiar system was to prove unavailing on this morning when again came a savage strike. I failed to hold him, but much encouraged, I persisted in this trolling method, and soon I had hooked another beauty and beached him after a short fight. Five fish I landed in this manner before the school moved onward. Then I again baited with squid and allowed my outfit to rest on the bottom.

The sun was well up by now, and the dry sand was hissing along the beach, propelled by a southerly breeze. Far out at sea the sails of a trawler showed above the horizon, and deep down was the trail of smoke left by a steamer. To the right and to the left of me the beach receded into the distance, relieved only by the irregular formations of the dunes, capped sparingly with rank salt grass. No sign of life anywhere, excepting for the gulls, and my two companions standing knee-deep in the surf and as intent upon their fishing as a pair of herons. It was good to be there. Good to feel the salt spray in my face, and the waves slapping against my boots, but best of all to be a-fishing.

There came a nibbling at my bait and then my line straightened, and I set the hook. It came in freely enough for a few yards, then there was an ineffectual struggle, and I had landed a peculiar

flat fellow, dark brown on one side and white on the other, with eyes located both on the same side of his blunt head. This was a flounder; a fish with little enough of beauty about him, a weak fighter, but nevertheless a most excellent fish for the pan. I gladly laid him in the moss-lined hole which contained my previous captures, and went after his brother. Him also I got, and a cousin or two and what must have been a granddaddy.

When the tide had been running for several hours, the fish left off feeding entirely. So I tied to a number-eight hook a piece of bunker fully as large as my hand—which is no very dainty member—and after making my cast, I sat myself down on the soft sand, with the rod stuck upright between my boots, and the sun warming my back.

For better than an hour I sat there, just smoking and loafing, and becoming more convinced each minute that happiness should be spelled f-i-s-h-i-n-g. Content to let the hours slip by, and not caring a whoop-te-de whether the fish bit or not. Then of a sudden I was brought half standing by a savage screech from my reel as the tip of the rod swept downward. I grasped the butt, and put on the brake for all I was worth.

The line was going out at a great rate, and as I lay back on the rod I yelled in excitement. There was some great creature on the other end of

the line, that was certain, but I had been half asleep when the strike came, and so what manner of fish it was I could not pretend to determine. Then the mystery was solved, for four hundred feet out to sea a huge form broke water and reared its length in the air. An enormous shark, and I groaned aloud, for without a wire leader I knew there was no chance of holding him. An instant later there came a snappy jerk on the line, and I felt it go slack.

There had been a great run of striped bass along the Jersey shore. Tide would be full about eight, and as the best of the fishing ordinarily came the last couple of hours of flood, Art and I landed upon the beach a half hour or so before sun-up with our outfits and a goodly mess of clams all nicely cleaned.

Other fishermen were on the beach before us this morning as the glimmering campfires above and below us attested. One or two shadowy figures were in evidence, also, as we waded into the surf and made our casts.

After a bit a glint of rosy light showed low in the sky, which spread and brightened perceptibly with each minute that passed, and almost before we were conscious of the fact it was daylight. A blue-gray morning, with white spume drifting in

from the sea, and the low breakers sending their froth about our ankles. I knew the lay of the beach, and I had chosen to fish a deep hole while the tide was making, for I have a theory that bass are in the habit of feeding in deep water during low and half tide, and moving to the flats for clams and mussels at flood.

A hundred yards north of us I saw our nearest neighbour working with a fish, and presently he stooped and carried up the beach a small specimen of seven or eight pounds. I had raised my head to call my companion's attention to this interesting development when I saw his line straighten with a jerk, and at the same instant his rod flashed backward. This fish made a short run of fifty feet or so, then swam parallel with the beach until Art had worked him into a roller which carried him gently high and dry up on the sand. This was another small fellow. Not large enough to put any strain on the tackle or the fisherman, but an excellent weight for the pan.

I changed my position after this capture, and cast into a swirl of green, frothy water, which marked a flat. For an hour or more I held the rod, only bringing in my cast at intervals to renew the bait, for clams, besides being the natural food for stripers, are much relished by crabs which were plentiful at this point.

Presently I was joined by a grizzled old fellow who had put in the night a-fishing without result. A garrulous old chap of long acquaintances, and he proceeded to enlighten me upon the habits of salt-water fish in general, and in particular upon the peculiar traits of stripers. He assured me that there was not the slightest use in fishing at this time of tide. To which I replied by baiting afresh, and making a short cast into the ruffled water. Seeing that I was not one to profit by his advice, he proceeded to recount for my edification a recent experience. It seemed that a day or two previous he had hooked what he claimed to be a gold medal fish, which means one of twenty-five pounds or better, and had worked him into the undertow after an exciting combat.

"The waves were running high," he said, gesticulating with both hands in order to show me the exact height and shape of the waves in question, "and three times they brought that there fish in, and laid him at my feet, and three times they took and snatched him from my hands. At last I sez to myself, do or die. Do or die, sez I, and the next time the fish was fetched in, I up and grabbed the line with my two hands and laid back on her——"

I do not know, I probably never will know, whether that line held or whether it gave way

under the strain put upon it, for at this point in his narrative I felt a lift, and as the hook was set, my line shot out from the reel.

For an instant my companion stood, with bulging eyes and with widespread arms delineating the last scene in his recent encounter. Then: "By gosh, you've hooked into one!" he shouted, and leaped into the air with the agility of a boy.

"Now take it easy, an' don't get excited," he counselled, snatching his hat from his head and slapping it against his thigh. "Give him line, an' don't snub him or you'll lose him sure pop," he warned me as the fish bore seaward. And all through the battle the old fellow persisted in shouting his advice and his admonitions to be calm, to none of which did I pay the slightest heed, for my mind was fully occupied with the work before me.

One long run the striper made, then worked southward toward a long jetty which reached into the ocean, and only by vigorous pumping did I succeed in turning him in the opposite direction, and keep him from fouling. Another rush, but shorter this time, then foot by foot I worked him toward shore. At last he came close in to the breakers, where the beach shelved off abruptly, and from this point I did not seem able to budge

him. Back and forth, to and fro, he swam, until at last, as I felt his struggles lessening, I put a bit more strain on the line. He came to me then, on a curling wave, and slipping my fingers beneath his gills I dragged him up the beach.

There was a ringing yell in my ear, and a heavy hand swatted me betwixt the shoulders.

"I knew you could do it," a voice shouted. "I knew if you followed my advice, an' kept calm like I told you, you'd land him, and he's a medal fish, sure as you're born."

This is surf fishing, as it is practised at a thousand points along our shores, though not always with success to equal the examples I have given. And yet, not infrequently, the results will be far more satisfying.

A man may spend a day on the beach and come home at evening with an empty basket, and yet count the day not wasted. Many things there are to be caught besides fish: the sunlight, the salty breeze that sweeps the dunes, healthful exercise. And also, there is a certain satisfaction of the soul which comes to most of us when old ocean rolls before our eyes. There is a vastness about it, and yet restfulness. Power and strength are expressed in every breaker, and yet the sonorous beat of them lulls us to sleep. The omnipotence of it all assures us of our own insignificance

and unimportance in the scheme of nature, but at the same time it satisfies us of the futility of worry and complaint over the small irritations of life. Personally, I believe that after a day or a week beside the blue water I come home a better man, and if the results are not permanent, it is no fault of my tutor. At least I am sure that I return happier, and more contented, and younger in spirit and in body.

CHAPTER II

IN QUEST OF THE CHANNEL BASS

CHANNEL BASS! A name to conjure with, surely, for those who have never undergone the experience of taking one of those "bulldogs of the sea" as they like to call them down in Jersey. And then again, it isn't only the channel bass that prove so fascinating. How many of us long to wander down the misty beaches on long, drowsy days in August, with the miles upon miles of lazy breakers rolling in across the bars at low tide; to run splashing across the ankle-deep flats, casting a speculative eye up and down the beach for a good "slough" where in a few weeks the "drum" will be found. The fascination lies in the sea, the birds, the whispering dunes, and the loneliness and wildness that goes with the pounding surf and the gray sands from Jersey to the Carolinas and on and on to the palm-strewn coasts of Florida.

I think perhaps one of the wildest stretches of coast I have ever seen was at New River Inlet, North Carolina. I climbed a great dune and gazed off; to the northward . . . sand and

sea; to the south . . . the dunes melted with the waves in the mists of Topsail Inlet.

I have sought his majesty *Sciænops ocellataus* in the Carolinas, in Florida, and his cousin the white sea bass on the Pacific, but somehow, no matter where I am, my thoughts keep turning back to the sandy wastes of my own Jersey and the restless tides of Barnegat.

I shall never forget my first trip to the inlets, those wild and lonely lands of sand and waters to the southward. It was in the spring, that season of all times of the year when the angler's spirit, lying dormant through the long, cold winter months, breaks through its caterpillar existence and spreads its wings to the warmth and life of the coming golden summer. We had heard of one inlet in particular; heard that here was a paradise for the surf fisherman, a place remote from the mad, rushing torrent of civilized man where with the dunes and the sea one could hold communion with one's soul and dream away the days, fishing the currents to one's heart's desire. It seemed almost too good to believe, but we decided to ventur forth and see if we could at least find that which we all needed badly just then—rest.

So our little party, with Teddy as the moving spirit, packed our tents and duffle, loaded them into our cars, and sped toward the southward.

At Beach Haven all roads ceased, and here we embarked for our trip down the bay to the now famous "point o' beach." This part of Jersey has romance and adventure lying at every turn. At the Cedars, so the legend runs, a band of pirates once buried their treasure when pursued by a Government cutter. To this day, with a west wind, one can pick up old Spanish doubloons and pieces of eight in the sand, and a native of Beach Haven has in his possession a rare cutlass found many years ago at the enchanted spot. Many a night I used to waken, and getting up, wander down the moonlit sand, half expecting to be confronted at any moment by the ghost of some old buccaneer returning to reclaim his own. *We* never found any treasure, but who knows but what it was there in the beauty of the sedge, the wheeling birds, and the salt air from off the sea that gave us that which is infinitely more precious than all the gold of all the ages . . . health and contentment.

We pitched our tents in the shelter of the dunes far enough from the water to escape the high tides, near enough to hear the surge and hiss of the waves as we sat of nights around the dying fire, near enough, in the freshness and sparkle of the glorious mornings, to race madly down the sand, clad as Nature made us, to plunge into the

curling breakers, emerging tingling from tip to toe and with ravenous appetites.

We always enjoyed breakfast. It began the day for us, and of necessity, it *must* be good! And it was, for Teddy was an excellent cook. There are few things I can think of more enjoyable than to sit down before a crackling blaze to a breakfast of planked bluefish, hot biscuits and coffee, while to the eastward the sun is just rising over the dunes, and down at the point the faint screams of the wheeling gulls foretell a long day of wonderful sport.

The conditions at this inlet from an angler's standpoint were ideal. A lone point projected into the Inlet and the inrushing tide formed on the north side of this point a great tide rip in which fish of all kinds seemed to feed. The outgoing tide created the same formation on the south side of the point, and in the slack water of this last-named rip from the turn of the flood to dead low water lay some of the greatest fishing we were ever to experience in southern Jersey.

That first morning, what a glorious sight met our eyes! The sun had just risen, filling the whole world with its warmth and rosy light, and the ocean lay, like a vast mill pond, sparkling and dancing in the golden rays. The gulls had commenced to gather over the point, and as we

trudged over the crunching sand, we could see flashes of spray here and there where the big tide-running weakfish were breaking water in their mad rushes for the small bait fish. By the time we had reached the rip and assembled our tackle, the school had sunk, so we turned to the eastward where lay the surf, rolling in across the bars for miles, as far as one could see to the northward.

We waded, knee-deep, in the foaming breakers, and cast; some of us landing on the inner bar, others in the "slew" which at this point ran parallel with the beach for several hundred yards. Almost immediately the sport commenced and we were kept busy reeling in the big tide runners, the gay little croakers, or the luscious kingfish. By noon we had landed sufficient to keep our larder well stocked for some time to come, so by common consent we called a halt and broke up to start off "exploring."

It was the spring of the year, the month of June if I remember rightly, and the beaches were very beautiful. For miles the great gray dunes lay facing the sea, like sentinels keeping an everlasting watch along the coasts, their flanks bedecked with the new green sedge, sweet smelling and fragrant. Miniature inlets and sloughs flowed back between them, converging and diverging in different direc-

tions. One of these, I remember, ran not far back of our camp and here we daily washed our dishes. This particular slough was infested with many horseshoe or king crabs and we amused ourselves by shooting at them with our revolvers, a harmless amusement, for they would either settle more determinedly into the sand or rush wildly for the outlet and the sea, causing us great laughter.

It was mating time, too, and from every dune and marshy place the plaintive cries of the nesting plover came to us, punctuated at times by the sharp bark of a fox of which the dunes held quite a few. And how wild and lonely it all was! During the two weeks we spent there we saw not a living soul. In fact, we only counted three sails in all on the distant horizon. The coast there is a fierce and dangerous one, with continually shifting bars, and woe betide the ship that ventures too near the shore. We might have been so many Robinson Crusoes, so far as the outside world was concerned. We were cut off from everything save our own thoughts.

Fresh water was scarce; we carried what we had with us. So Charlie and I decided to tramp to the nearest Coast Guard Station, which lay to the north, and get a shave in good, hot fresh water. It was a bluff and rugged station we found, peopled by keen, rough, blue-eyed men—men who

at any moment must be ready, if necessity called, in the dark of night, to put a boat through a wild northeast surf and *make* it live. They greeted us kindly, inquired as to the fishing, and told us to help ourselves.

How good it felt to bathe in sweet water again! How good it seemed to cleanse the salt from our eyes, the beards from our faces, with the soft rain water, their only source of supply. As we left the captain handed us a red flare. "If you boys ever need assistance, burn this," he said. And we knew then, here lay the reason for the steadily lessening toll of lives taken yearly by the shifting shoals.

One morning we were awakened by voices, and crawled out of our tents to see two strangers warming themselves over the coals of our dying fire. At first glance I wasn't impressed. In after years they became two of the best friends and anglers I have ever known, and many a night and day since have we spent together down the wind-swept sands.

They talked that morning, in the cold gray light of the coming dawn, of channel bass and "drum," and of the great schools of the former the fishermen had seen far at sea, making for the Inlet. And they told us where to fish at the inlet—the tide rips. And as the day dawned, we all sat around the fire, cooking breakfast and planning. "Hal"

and "Lew" we learned to call them, and Hal and Lew they shall always remain, two of the best anglers that ever trod the dreary wastes of southern Jersey.

The morning proved uneventful, but as Old Sol swung overhead and started toward the west there were developments. Lew had the first touch. He was standing knee-deep at the point, his line straight out ahead of him in the swift current of the rip. He raised his hand as a signal and the next moment his rod commenced to nod, his reel to sing, and the fight was on. What a glorious battle it was! Up and down the beach, contesting every foot of the way, went the angler and the fish, until Lew became once more the master and worked his quarry near the beach. It was then that he broke water and a beautiful sight he presented, his scales glinting coppery bronze through the green water.

Lew watched his chance, waited until the right wave came along, and gently lifted his fish in front of it, whereupon the momentum of the inrushing water carried the bass within reach of his eager grasp. Thirty-seven pounds of red-blooded resistance! Enough to fill the craving of any angler.

I shall *never* forget that ebb tide. It stands out in my memory as one of those "lucky" days

which comes so rarely in a fisherman's life. Teddy hooked a bass that carried him around the point and out of sight. He did not beach it until half an hour later. Lew fought and landed another, a thirty-seven pounder also, evidently the mate to his first one. The tide ebbed lower and lower. A great flock of gulls were screaming over a school of bluefish about a half a mile out in the Inlet. We could distinctly hear their cries above the gurgle of the outgoing tide.

I hung a small bass and lost him. Then Hal drew the prize of the day. He hooked the grandfather of all channel bass. Dusk was coming on and he stood silhouetted against the sunset clouds, his rod swaying seaward, his reel humming in spasmodic jerks. He passed out of sight into the dusk, waving to us as he went. Long after he had vanished we could still hear him, hurling defiance at his antagonist. Then the tide turned, and the fish stopped biting.

We returned to camp, tired and hungry, and gathered eagerly around the cheery blaze while Teddy prepared the evening meal, a marvellous concoction of fish, mulligan, and what-not which we devoured like ravenous wolves.

A figure loomed up out of the ghostly dunes and Hal came into the light of the fire, dragging behind him a beautiful bass.

"Took me clean 'round into the surf," he said; "where are the scales, boys?"

We crowded close as he held the great coppery warrior up in the flickering light, and watched the needle on the scales quiver at forty-eight pounds. We were not jealous; only proud that one of our comrades had been so lucky, had had the skill to land such a prize, and we congratulated him.

Weary but content we at last sought our tents for the night. Here I might say a word in regard to sleeping garments, the care in the selection of which is quite essential. I have found it never pays to lay down any set rules in regard to the outdoors. Each sportsman has different tastes, different ideas. Tell of those things which *you* have found a help, or an aid, and perhaps, among them, your brother sportsmen may find that which may, in some future time, prove of value.

Our sleeping garments were simple but comfortable. A pair of woollen pajamas, a skating cap, or a cap made out of an old stocking to keep insects or blowing sand out of your ears, and a pair of heavy socks, such as lumbermen wear, made up our equipment. The last is quite necessary, for as long as your feet are warm the chances of your catching cold are very slight.

With a great satisfying feeling fluctuating

through my soul I crawled into the little shelter tent which Charlie and I shared together.

Far to the north came the steady flash of the Seahaven Light, and on our own point the little beacon steadily kept pace with it. Above us the stars maintained an everlasting vigil, and a lightness in the east showed that the moon was on her way to join them.

From somewhere out of the night, across the embers of the dying fire, floated the sound of voices in "close harmony":

Oh, why don't you work like the other men do?
How the h—— can we work when there's no work to do!

Thinking this was pretty good advice, I rolled over and dozed off, lulled to sleep by the rustle of the wind through the dry grass and the roar of the distant breakers.

The old world seemed very beautiful.

. . . . . .

All good things must, sooner or later, reach an end, and thus with our trip. The others must go, but I would stay; Hal and Lew were going cruising on the former's boat and they asked me. The lure of the open spaces, the sands and the sea, was too much for me, so I remained.

We climbed on board the *Drifter* and bade the others good-bye. Then we were off, new lands to explore, new beaches to tramp, strange seas to tempt our lines.

We had decided to try Brigantine Shoals as Hal had told us he had seen several schools of drum there a short time previous. We anchored off the beach and rowed ashore in the dinghy. Upon landing we found the small fish very plentiful, and soon had sufficient for the larder. The shore bird season had just opened, and, strolling up the beach with my .20-gauge, I soon had enough fat snipe for supper. I think all the snipe and shore birds in the world made their home at New Inlet. I have rarely seen so many anywhere else.

When I returned I found Lew "fast" in a large shark which was tearing seaward with awful speed, and Hal invoking all the gods in the sea or beneath it to hurl a curse upon the one that had just run off with his line.

I cast out with a large squid head for bait, and in no time had a "pick up". I was literally carried along the beach by the rush of a big shark which jumped out of water three times in quick succession and then departed with my tackle. I saw this shark distinctly. He was at least 18 or 20 feet long and black as ink. He would have weighed a thousand pounds.

By some trick of fate there was but one wire leader among us and that was Lew's, so he possessed the only real chance of success. After forty-five minutes of exhausting work he beached his shark, an eight-footer, on a sand bar, and I waded out and shot him with my Luger.

From then on Hal and I fished more for the excitement than with the hope of landing anything, spurred on, I suppose, with the vain hope that, through some fluke, we *might* be lucky enough to beach one. But alas! no sooner would we cast into the current than our arms would be nearly jerked from their sockets by the rush of a huge shark. They never got far before the tackle broke, but it was thrilling while it lasted. Lew landed another shark, a small one, and followed this by a sting ray which measured four feet across the back. This was the first ray I had ever seen taken in Jersey and was different from any I have ever seen. Hal and myself, having run out of gut leaders, could only watch Lew, and by the time he beached his ray it was supper time.

My! What a supper! Broiled bluefish, fat luscious snipe, onions and potatoes, fruit and other wonderful appetizers so charmed us that I was afraid Lew was going to have apoplexy.

Rummaging through my kit, the while bemoaning our scarcity of wire leaders, I came across

two tarpon rigs that had seen service in the blue-green waters of a southern fairyland, and our hopes for the morrow revived.

We rolled into our bunks and with pipes between our teeth regaled each other with tales that ranged from Canada to the Spanish Main. Outside the wind moaned dismally across the dunes, the far-off hollow roar of the surf faintly reached our ears, and the lap-lap of the water against the boat all combined to lull us off to sleep.

"Let's go, boys!" was the next thing I heard, and I awoke with the aroma of sizzling bacon in my nostrils to see Hal with a frying pan in one hand, squatting on the floor of the cabin and dishing out crisp brown pieces that to look at sent a tingle through our jaws.

We made short work of breakfast, washed it down with steaming cups of coffee, and soon were on the beach, eager for the unknown. Lew said he'd had enough of sharks for a while and would try the snipe, so he took his gun and disappeared in the dunes. Hal cast out while I was rigging up, and soon was fast in a fish of some kind. By the time I was ready he was being carried down the beach and soon passed from view behind a dune, his rod swaying and nodding seaward.

"Well, here goes, Mister Shark," I said to myself, and made my cast. My bait lit in the

thoroughfare which ran within twenty feet of the beach. Almost instantly I felt the familiar pick up, and the line commenced to run in. I struck hard, and he went to sea like a bullet. Glory! how he did pull! My thumb became cramped from the strain of holding down on the line, and my body ached from the savage jabs made in it at every lunge. Away out in the channel a big fin broke water and I knew I had a large shark. Down the beach he took me and I begrudgingly gave line, placing all the strain I dared on the fragile nine strands. Finally I checked him, and in some twenty or more minutes had him near the shore.

Suddenly I saw him, a flash of coppery red, and to my amazement I perceived I had hooked a big channel bass. His method of taking the bait and the fin in the channel when he broke water with his tail had deceived me into believing it was a shark. I worked him into the undertow and slipping my fingers through his gills, dragged him up on the sands, a beautiful "bulldog of the sea," a forty-one-pound bass. Hal arrived about then with his fish, a bass also of thirty-eight pounds, and we clasped hands.

All too soon we had to leave and return to civilization, but the memory of those happy days down the beaches will live forever in our hearts.

The seasons passed. Some winters we cast in the surf along the picturesque palm-strewn sands of Florida and took a goodly toll of "redfish," our old channel bass friends of Jersey. Some springs found us down in the Carolinas, the long, lonely beaches of Dixie casting a spell over us that was hard to overcome. Here the bait was mullet, big fat ones of a pound or more, and how those bass did enjoy them!

But then, one fall, a voice came up from southern Jersey, a voice born on the salt wind from the sea, mixed with the smell of the pines and the vast marshes, and it seemed to say, "The channel bass are in once more. Come down to Barnegat."

And so we went. This time I had my own boat, the *Nepenthe*, a beautiful little cruiser, fitted out to one's heart's desire, and with old friends such as Billy and Frank and Art, the party was complete.

Down where Barnegat Light looks toward the sea at last we came to anchor. And here we stayed, and fished, for the great fall run of channel bass was on. Until that was ended the world would forget our existence.

Art was lucky. The weaks and blues seemed to be waiting for him where'er he cast. The "channels," too, were there, and from dawn until purple sunset we fought them down the beaches,

waded through the surf, lost many a tackle, and won many a fish, laughed and swore, and were glad we were alive.

One day toward the end of the season we stood, strung along the beach from the Inlet down the dunes, wondering if the drum had left.

A great shout from Billy arrested our attention, and turning, we saw him racing down to the water's edge hanging onto a violently jerking rod, while his line tore off as if a demon was attached to the other end. Whether this was a fact or not was never ascertained, for the struggle soon stopped and Billy stood ruefully regarding what was left of his prize Cuttyhunk line.

"Fisherman's luck!" he said with a resigned air. "What do you suppose that could have been?"

We never had time to wonder, for just then Art tightened up on his line, struck hard, and the next instant was trying to break the rush of a fighting channel bass bound for unknown seas.

He fought him down the glistening sands on and on until he was but a distant silhouette against a blood-red sun sinking beneath the great salt marshes. At last he beached him, a vanquished warrior, pulsating copper and gold in the dying sunset.

It was the last channel bass of the year. We

turned our faces homeward, filled with happiness but sadly feeling in our inmost hearts that until spring came once more southern Jersey and her channel bass would be but a memory.

The ceaseless ocean gnaws upon our coasts
The white-winged seagulls throng our shores once more.
Across the lonely dunes the chill winds sweep
Upon a barren shore.

THE CALL OF LONELY PLACES

Billow on rolling billow
  Each with its foaming crest,
Seeming to ceaselessly beckon,
  Calling in vague unrest.

Ever its restless bosom
  Rolling in long, dark swells,
Rises in emerald mountains,
  Sinks into sea-green dells.

Ever its misty headlands
  Fade into filmy gray,
Ever the sound of its breakers
  Thunders and dies away.

Land of the sportsman's fancy,
  Waters untried by rod,
Distance that knows no trespass
  Saving the Hand of God.

Barren and bleak and lonely,
  Waiting the pioneer,
Ruled by the power of the Red Gods,
  Silent and deep and austere.

Land of the open spaces,
  Far from the cold world's hum,
Land of the Lone, you call me,
  Land of the Free, I come!

PHILIP ARNOLD LA VIE.

CHAPTER III

GOLD MEDAL FISH AND OTHERS

WE WERE camping on the dunes, where the Inlet cutting through miles of salt meadows has built up a succession of bars, which at low water, the sun shining upon them—as it has a penchant for doing during the fishing season—appear as golden ribbons above the surrounding breakers. This is a justly famous spot for channel bass, and all those lesser fish that love the cuts and inlets. Farther to the south, on the same beach, one could reach in a half hour's walk a shallow point of land jutting into the ocean, and shelving into deep water a hundred feet from shore. Here many a striper had been taken, when conditions were right, and in the autumn at this same spot the bluefish chased their prey into the undertow.

Shore birds, the little sandpipers and their cousins the yellowlegs, gabbled up and down the beach, and back in the marshes a colony of gulls had raised their broods with an eye no doubt to the excellent fishing so close to hand, and even

this late in the season their wild cries sounded throughout the hours of daylight.

The proximity of gulls and terns has always suggested scathers of fish to me, since that first memorable trip to the surf, when ignorant as I was of the habits of seagoing fishes, I cast my bait 'neath where a flock of these birds hovered over the water and immediately hooked a thirty-three-pound channel bass. Since then I have always been temperamentally affected by these roving birds, and a sight of them in any numbers brings an itching to my thumb which only the friction of a rapidly revolving reel can allay. Yes, time and again the gulls have led me to rich treasure of hard-fighting beauties, and time and again, I must confess, they have fooled me into mad dashes up and down the beach, when nought resulted from my efforts. Yet even though the activities of this bird were entirely disassociated from the movements of the fishes, I know that I should still value his companionship on the lone stretches of beach where I pursue my sport.

In each of those varied environments into which my adventuring of the past has led me I have found some feathered creature who seemed to be peculiarly a part of his surroundings, and whose memory I have treasured long after the incidents of that particular trip were forgotten.

I have been thrilled by the soft melody of wood thrush and hermit, as the strains of their melting notes echoed through the depths of forest aisles. I have listened by the hour to the lyric voice of white throat and warbler, and on western bayous the cheery whistle of the cardinal has delighted my ear. And yet the wild, harsh cry of the gull appeals to my senses as strongly as do the finest efforts of these feathered musicians. For there are times and places and certain moods when a man cares most for the bigger, sterner things of life. There is little of melody in the voice of a gull, this I grant you, but there is an individual quality to it, a sort of untamed force which makes it a very part of those vast, wild spaces in which the bird lives his ever-strenuous existence.

Upon the wing he is a strong and steady flier, quick and graceful in all his movements, and untiring in sustained flight, as he needs must be to breast the winds which sweep our coasts. To see a flock of these birds wheeling, darting, and diving into the waves above a school of feeding fish is an inspiring spectacle, and one which will appeal to all who possess a particle of the romance of the wild in their souls.

Yes, I am assured that the gull fits into his environment as well as does the thrush, and the lark, and the cardinal into theirs, and I am con-

" . . . to sense the jarring rush of the striper."

"Slipping my fingers through his gills, I dragged him up on the sands, a beautiful bulldog of the sea."

vinced, too, that there is as great an inspirational quality in his wild, free cry as can be found in the song of the most gifted woodland warbler.

It was the sight of a flock of gulls hovering and swooping into the waves, close inshore, that drew me from my culinary duties before the open fire one morning during this camping trip I have in mind. The sun had but lately lifted its burnished face above the waters, and in the misty haze that had followed a coolish night objects appeared unreal and evanescent. There was, however, something very real and promising in the clamour which arose from the feeding birds, and with little loss of time I shed the red bandana—the official insignia of the camp chef, and grasping rod and tackle bag, I hurried to the beach. And not a thought did I give to the pots of food which hung above the coals, for what counts scorched food or the cravings of the stomach when fish are feeding in the surf?

When I reached the spot where the gulls were circling, though I peered keenly into the green water, I saw no sign of the fish I sought, and yet that here was a school of the mullet on which blues and weakfish love to feed was proven by a reddish patch of considerable extent, which moved slowly through the water some fifty feet from where I stood.

My rod was equipped with a Belmar squid,

so I wasted no time in meditation over what manner of fish had attracted my brother fishermen, the gulls, but made my cast, working the lure rapidly shoreward. No strike rewarded my efforts, and so again I cast, and yet again without result. And still the gulls darted, swooped, and clamoured, as though encouraging me to further efforts. On my eighth or tenth cast I varied my system, and on the chance that the fish, whatever they were, might be cutting into the bait from below, I allowed the squid to sink, and brought it to me with long, jerky movements. Scarce had I taken a dozen turns when there came a mighty strike which swept the tip of my rod downward, the reel handle striking my knuckle a sound crack as it was jerked from my grasp. Out and out my line swept, while with every nerve atingle I pressed hard on the leather drag and braced back against the rod. A hundred, two hundred, three hundred feet of line the fish took ere he halted his rush, and swam parallel to the beach. I felt sure that another besides a blue, or else a monster specimen of this hard-fighting species had fastened to my squid, and I played him carefully. Fifteen or twenty minutes of battle he gave me ere I had him close inshore, and then as he lifted into a curling breaker, with the sun shining greenly through, I made him out. A good

striped bass he was, and long before I had succeeded in coaxing him into a wave which laid him gently at my feet I had raised such a to-do that my two friends, aroused at last from their slumbers, joined me, a bit shy as to clothing but fully equipped with rods and tackle.

Five bass, ranging up to eighteen pounds in weight, we took from this school in the space of an hour, and then the fish moved onward, and the gulls with them, and we returned to camp for a belated though doubly relished breakfast.

This catching of striped bass on metal squids is no uncommon occurrence in late fall, but this early in the season it was quite out of the ordinary. Unlike blues and weakfish, they are not surface feeders, and are less easily located for this reason. Along about the middle of October and well into November the bass congregate at the mouths of tidal rivers and inlets, where they feed on the mullet for several weeks before moving inland for their winter's rest. I have even known them to be taken at night by squidding, the only surf-feeding fish that has come to my attention that will strike an artificial lure at this time.

For the week preceding this day which brought us the stripers the wind had come steadily from the east, stirring up a heavy sea, and causing a strong cut which made fishing extremely difficult. On

the morning in question the wind had shifted to south-westerly and our expectations of a change in luck had been brilliantly sustained. No class of angler is more dependent upon weather conditions than is the surfman. An offshore wind ordinarily causes the fish to work inshore, and means a full basket for the fisherman. And yet the striper, like the muskallunge of inland waters, loves rough water. It means a greater movement in the ocean bed and a stirring up of the bait on which he loves to feed. My experience has been that the first day following a storm or a shift in the wind is usually the best time to take these fellows.

I have indulged in few excursions which yielded more in the way of varied and unique experiences than did those days which followed our action with the stripers. Though no more striped bass were taken that day, when the tide came full the blues which had been breaking water, far offshore, followed the mullet across the outer bar and gave us sport of the highest order. No fish that swims will make a harder or more spectacular fight than a bluefish; he takes the bait on the jump, and from the first smashing strike one is kept busy until the fish is beached. And no man can count his blue until he has him lying at his feet. He is a rushing, charging demon, one instant boring deep down or out for the open sea,

the next breaking from the rollers in a succession of flashing leaps, head shaking, and gills gaped redly. Not one out of three that are hooked is ever brought to land, unless one is dealing with small specimens. Those we caught on this day ranged in weight from six to seven pounds. And this is another thing I have noticed. On a certain tide one may catch a dozen blues of the weight I have mentioned, and on a succeeding tide and in the same place they may average half the weight. One of my companions on this expedition, who fished alone, a half mile below us, captured seven blues in a single tide which did not vary five ounces either side of four pounds.

Whenever it is possible to use them I prefer artificial to natural bait, and yet there is no question but what a metal squid implanted between the jaws of a fish will lessen his activity to a marked degree.

During this trip we used the squid almost exclusively in our fishing for bluefish and striped bass. A number-eight spoon hook, with the hook attached to the blade of the spoon, proved an effective lure also. Several times when the mullet came close we captured them with a cast net, and when the blues were breaking water they rarely refused this natural bait when well cast and kept on the move.

Just below our camp there was a bar which projected far into the ocean, and this point was a favourite gathering place for the mullet and their enemies the bluefish, when the tide was full. We noticed that the schools of feeding fish invariably followed a certain course as they came upon this flat, entering it from the north, close inshore, and swinging outward and then northward at a given point. On their journey they were a good two hundred and fifty feet from the breakers, a long cast, even with a heavy squid, and a long fight before they were beached at last. It seemed that the schools of bluefish lay in a hole just at the edge of this bar between rushes after the mullet, and a strong cast with a mullet bait would sometimes reach the spot and rarely failed to yield a strike.

Our night fishing, which brought several channel bass to fatten our score, also resulted in the capture of a great number of bluefish, but without exception these were small specimens averaging around two pounds in weight. Never did the larger blues work over the outer bar after nightfall.

Several days following our experience with the striped bass I noticed fish breaking water almost in the undertow, and but a short distance above our camp. My very first cast with a small squid afforded me an out-of-the-ordinary experience in

surf fishing, for when I had brought the struggling captive close, I saw that instead of what I had supposed to be blues, I had cast into a school of bonito. Before the fish left I had succeeded in beaching three specimens of about three pounds each, and lost at the same time that many strikes. I found it necessary to work my bait much more rapidly than when squidding for the bluefish. It gave me a rare opportunity to compare the fighting ability of the two fish, regarding which there had been more or less argument among offshore fishermen. Without question, the bonito was a faster fish in the water, but he in no way compared with his more robust compatriot as a slap bang, bull-dog scrapper.

Rarely do bonito come close enough to the beach to be reached by the surfman. They love the deep ridges, twelve to twenty miles offshore, where they disport themselves throughout late summer and early fall, in the company of albacore and their mighty cousin, the tuna. It is not generally known that along our Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to at least as far south as the Carolinas, tuna are to be found in greater number and reaching a far larger size than any that have ever been reported at the far-famed Catalina. Why they are not more generally fished for is hard to understand, though the fact that their exist-

ence has never been widely advertised partly accounts for it. Among the pound fishermen they are known as horse mackerel, and they probably have been more heartily cussed by these hardy salts than any other fish that come to their nets. A big tuna will frequently tear a pocket to rags, at the cost of considerable time and expense, and yet thousands of tuna are taken from the pounds each year. I have myself seen as high as eleven of these fish brought to the beach by a single boat, and ranging as high as eight hundred pounds in weight.

Fishing for tuna from a sea skiff is unquestionably a strenuous and at times even a hazardous undertaking, and if one is addicted to sea sickness my advice would be to refrain from indulging in it. Yet to the red-blooded angler this form of sport has a fascination which grips deep. One finds one's self in a twenty-five-foot skiff far out of sight of land, with the boat pounding into the rollers, topping them, and tipping over their crests for a sickening plunge down the other side. The wind and the salt spray are in one's face, and buckets of water deluge one's clothing, and at the same time you are fast to a hundred pounds or more of concentrated energy in the shape of a fish, who at one rush reels off a thousand feet of line, and who mayhap will tow your boat for hours, until he is

brought to gaff. This, to my notion, comes near to reaching the pinnacle of perfection as a straight sporting proposition. A small proportion of fish of over a hundred pounds in weight is ever landed. Either the line is cut by another specimen, it gives way under the tremendous strain, or the squid pulls loose. And yet, enough tuna are brought to boat to make the sport worth while; the percentage of lost fish only serving to make ultimate success more appreciated.

At the pound, several miles below our camp, they had been taking tuna regularly, and so one morning, conditions being favourable for an offshore venture, which in these parts means a west wind and a low surf, my companions and myself embarked in a twenty-one-foot sea skiff for a day on the ridges.

It was such a morning as comes only in late September and October, a mellow, hazy day with a bit of snap to the soft breeze which played over the dunes. The waves rolling in gently, with scarcely a suggestion of froth when they broke, made of the launching a simple and easy matter. The second ridge, a point some eighteen miles offshore, was our destination, yet every foot of water intervening offered a possible chance for bluefish or bonito. So we rigged our tackle and trailed three squids over the stern as the tiny boat

scuttled for the open sea. Soon after our start the sun appeared above the horizon and the gulls which had been streaming northward in small flocks, and singly, began flapping seaward, intent as were we upon locating the schools of feeding fish. Presently, Doc, who had been standing in the bow scanning the water before us, pointed to a spot a point or two off our course, and following the direction of his finger we made out a flock of birds working low over the waves. The skiff was headed in their direction, and ten minutes' chugging brought us close enough to enable us to make out the silvery forms of blues breaking water, sometimes leaping three feet into the air as they rushed through the school of bait. We were into them almost before we knew it, as was attested by a violent strike, which brought my stout rod smartly against the gunwale. The fish tore loose, but in an instant another had taken his place, and I saw a half-dozen darting shapes following in his wake as I reeled him slowly in. Landing a five-pound bluefish from a moving boat is arm-tiring work, and productive of bruised knuckles aplenty unless one's reel is equipped with an automatic drag. Our three fish—for my companions were each fast to a goodly specimen—were finally boated, and by that time our skipper had turned our craft and was again circling the school. Nine fish we took

before they sank, and we again headed for the ridges and the chances for a tuna.

Eight or ten miles out we ran into bonito, each of us hooking and landing his quarry, and from this time on, throughout the day, the strikes were separated by intervals of not more than ten or fifteen minutes. Not once, I believe, did these strikes come singly. There would be a shout from one of us, "Here they are!" followed instantly by the sight of flashing shapes behind the boat, and a sharp tug on the line. I trailed my own lure in the very wake of the propeller, for our Atlantic tuna are a bold fish, for whom the turmoil created by the flashing blades seems to hold a strange fascination. On this day, as the bonito were striking close, the sport was evenly divided.

The thin shadow to the westward which marked the mainland had disappeared from view, when a couple of miles off our port bow we marked a small fleet of boats circling steadily, lost to view as they sank into the trough, apparently to rise out of the sea again as they topped the waves. These market fishermen had located a tremendous school of bonito, we discovered, as we came up to them, and the hand liners were busy with their harvest. On this particular day each of these boats brought in from three to five barrels of these graceful and tasty

fish, which, at the market price of fifty dollars per barrel, meant a fat day's wage for each of the two or three men who made up the crews. But such hauls were by no means of daily occurrence. Hand line fishing is of course the killing method to employ if one cares nothing for the sport of the game, for one man with a heavy line can capture two fish while the rod is taking one, if the fish are in abundance. Where the schools are small and scattered, however, the rod will just about hold its own.

We found the fish really too plentiful in the proximity of the market fishers' boats to afford good sport, for that element of chance which is one of the chief charms of fishing was entirely lacking. Also, we were in quest of bigger game, and so we sheered off from our neighbours and hunted pastures new.

Out here on the open sea, with the green water stretching to the horizon on either hand, and with the knowledge that the entire expanse which lay before our eyes and thousands of miles beyond was the home and the breeding place for those creatures which furnish the angler his sport, it was borne home to me as never before that this was indeed the one everlasting fish pond of the world; a never-to-be-depleted source of supply for the sportsman.

After leaving the bonito, we spent an hour or

better in zigzagging from point to point in our search for the tuna, during which period we completely wrecked a huge box of sandwiches and fruit, for we none of us possessed the quality of digestive organs which are adversely affected by the pitching of a boat. It is a difficult matter and requires considerable dexterity to play an active bonito with one hand while poising a sandwich in the other, but it can be done if one is not too fastidious, and, after all, what are a few fish scales more or less in the life of a fisherman.

Our luncheon was suddenly terminated by a shout from Doc as the rod was almost jerked from his hands by a mighty strike. Doubtless this fish would have topped the man of medicine by a good many pounds, though we had no opportunity of proving the truth of this supposition, for the unexpectedness of the strike had given the fisherman no opportunity of throwing off the drag, which had been set at too heavy a tension, and the line snapped on the first rush.

As I glanced over the stern I had a glimpse of a huge, shadowy shape swimming in the very wake of the boat. Ten feet in length the creature appeared, and I expected him to hit my lure at any instant, such was his nearness to it. Then came a grunt from Bert, and I saw him lay back on his heavy rod. I jerked in my own squid, to give him

room to play his fish, and as I did so, I heard a crack like a pistol shot, and looked over my shoulder to see the captain's broken outrigger trailing behind us. Undoubtedly we were in a great school of tuna. There were swirls in the water behind us, and twice I glimpsed shiny green backs of unbelievable size rolling in our wake.

All this time my companion's line was shooting out at a great rate, the fish boring downward in a steady run that no line ever twisted could have halted. Five, six, seven hundred feet he took out before one could draw a half-dozen breaths. The boat had been throttled down during the trolling, but now we turned and speeded in the tuna's wake.

My companion's body was set tautly against the straining rod, and his eyes fairly bulged in his excitement. And well might he or any other man become excited under like conditions, for he was fastened to the most powerful fighting force that comes to the angler's lure. The stout rod was bent at such an angle that one expected it to snap at any moment, and yet with all the weight of the fisherman's body against it, and with the B-Ocean reel set at the greatest tension the tackle would bear, the line shot through the guides, a mere blur of light. At each mighty tug of the fish Bert's shoulders gave to the strain, and more than

once I heard a grunt escape him as the rod belt clove into his stomach.

When we reached our maximum speed, the fish had settled into a steady, straightaway run, and the line flowed out less and less rapidly. During the following hour there was little change in our relative position. The tuna had gained perhaps two hundred feet more of line, with the same amount still in reserve. The long run was varied by several lightning dashes to right and left, and for several minutes the fish fought on the surface, but for the most part it was a straight run out to sea. A smaller, less powerful man than my companion must have lost the fish long ere this, but he was fighting for all that was in him, and making the tuna work for every yard he gained. At the second hour the strain was beginning to tell on the fisherman. Perspiration poured down his face, and he shifted his position from time to time, to ease the strain on his back and abdominal muscles.

Three hours of this continuous bucking and lunging had passed, and that the captive was tiring somewhat under the strain was suggested by the fact that his surface fighting had become more frequent, and at these periods Bert was enabled to regain a few yards of line. And now, as though the excitement of the battle were not sufficient, other forces intervened to add to our

apprehension. Though the pitching of the boat had increased steadily during the combat, and had become so great that we kept our feet only with difficulty, none of us, with the exception of the skipper, had given a thought to the threatening aspect of the weather. We were brought sharply to a consciousness of the fact that real trouble might be brewing when our bow drove suddenly into a comber with such violence that the three of us were thrown in a heap against one of the cross seats. Fortunately, with the leverage supplied by his rod, Bert was enabled to hold his feet.

When I scrambled to my knees I perceived that the sky had become overcast with a heavy haze, while leaden clouds, rising in the west, completely obscured the sun which had been shining so cheerfully a few minutes before. The friendly, greenish hue was gone from the waves, and now, dark and sullen, they swept toward us in endless succession, their white crests shining against the dull sky. Our small craft rolled and pitched, and showered us with salt spray as she dropped into the rollers.

Our skipper shook his head doubtfully, in answer to my questioning glance.

"She's dead ag'in us!" he shouted above the turmoil of the waters. "By rights we ought to be headed shore'ard this minute, but I'll chance it another half hour if you say the word."

"Eureka."

"When the tide came full, we made great medicine."

I groaned aloud and looked at Bert dubiously. "How about it?" I asked. "Do you think there's a chance of beating him in that time?"

"I've gained a few feet of line in the last ten minutes," he answered, "and it seems to me he isn't quite as heavy as he was. I'll give him the gaff and see what happens," he added, as he lay back on the rod and pumped manfully.

A half hour; a small space of time it seemed when I considered the hours of battling which lay behind us, and yet perhaps too long a time when a thought of those miles of rough water that stretched between us and our harbour came to me.

Slowly, a turn at a time, and each turn only made by the greatest effort, my companion was taking in line. With the whole weight of his body he would surge backward on the rod, then, as the tip was lowered, a foot or two of that precious line would be regained. Literally, he was dragging the boat up to the fish. Given a stationary point to work from, our quarry would have taken the last foot of line in short order, for even now his strength was irresistible.

A hundred feet had been spooled in ten minutes or better. The next hundred came quicker, yet, had I not glanced at my watch, I would have sworn that an hour had elapsed. I stood in the bow of the boat, gaff in hand, eagerly scanning the

broken water before us, and at last it seemed to me that I glimpsed a swirl in the trough of the waves a couple of hundred feet ahead. I raised a shout, and glanced back at my companions. The skipper, as eager as any of us to boat the fish, nodded, and I knew that an extra ten minutes would be ours, though the boat were swamped to pay for it. As though encouraged by my shout, Bert pumped the harder, and presently I knew that my eyes had not played me false. Our captive was in view. Now his sharp tail appeared, as he rode a wave, now it was the metallic shimmer of his dark back that caught my eye. But this was no beaten fish I gazed upon. The huge shape—a full eight feet he appeared as he swam there before me—bore forward with the same power, it seemed, as when he had taken the bait nearly four hours before. Think of it! For four hours he had fought gallantly, doggedly against the weight of a powerful man in a plunging boat; with the waves buffeting him and with a barbed weight between his jaws, and not once had he rolled, or shown the slightest sign of surrender. What warm-blooded creature is there that could have given one half this exhibition of endurance? And far from being whipped, I am assured that he could have continued the battle for hours.

As we drew still closer, and I could see more

plainly the huge rounded shape of him, with his powerful sickle tail and torpedo head, then thought of the makeshift gaff in my hand—which we had constructed at the last minute from a bit of pointed steel and the handle of a broken oar—then was I filled with misgivings. And yet each minute that passed was precious, and I knew there was no chance of wearing the fish out, for even now we should be beating shoreward.

As the bow of the skiff drew up to him I leaned forward with outstretched arm, but before I could strike, the fish dove fairly under the boat. The skipper swung the tiller, and watching where the line touched the water, I took a chance and struck at my first glimpse of his broad back. There was a terrific surge, which dragged me half over the gunwale. My arms seemed about to be torn from my body; a thrashing tail deluged me with water, then I heard a splintering snap, and the tension relaxed. I looked downward through the brine that streamed from my face and perceived a foot of the broken gaff handle dangling between my fists. Of the fish there was no sign. My eyes turned to my companions, and I saw Bert gesticulating, shaking his two fists to the heavens, and from the movement of his lips I knew he was doing a noble job of cussing. A broken rod lay unheeded at his feet. Then we all cussed with equal force and

abandon, but with varying degrees of eloquence, after which the skipper swung the boat shoreward, where we arrived at ten o'clock that night.

This was our only chance for tuna on that trip, for the wind held strong from the west during the remainder of our stay on the beach. No one fished that night, of course, for we were all of us played out from the buffeting of the sea. The next evening, however, just at slack water, Doc cast a shiny side of mossbunker into a hole, and apparently directly into the mouth of a goodly striper, which he beached after a long battle. This proved to be the best fish of the trip, and a prize winner. Two days later we broke camp and trekked homeward, laden with trophies, each of us tanned and burned by sun and wind, but with both bodies and brains cleansed and purified by the healthful life we had led.

This was, as I hinted in the beginning, an unusual expedition from a standpoint of varied experiences; an entirely satisfying trip from every angle, yet not one half so good as the one I am planning this very minute.

NEW INLET

When the keen September breeze is singing through the
woods of pine,
And the gulls scream o'er the beaches where the breakers
roar and whine,
And the salt wrack fills your nostrils and the sand blows
through your hair
And you feel the joy of living in the sparkling sunlit air,
While along the lonely beaches flocks of snipe go trailing
by,
And there's glory in the colouring of earth and sea and sky.

Then Pard murmurs "What about it, pal?" and hints of
channel bass,
And clear nights at Little Sheepshead where the tide's
like liquid glass.
Then I hear my reel a-humming of its old familiar tune,
And I see the sunset shadows creep across a barren dune.
Talk about your calls of Nature—give me southern
Jersey's wild,
Where the shimmering ocean ripples with the laughter of a
child.

Let me see the breakers storming, whipped to frenzy in a
gale,
Let me see the storm clouds lifting, let me see its shadows
pale,

Till in richer, greater glory dawns a new and shining day,
And the tide rolls up the beaches where the wanton sunbeams play.
Give me just a few brief hours from life's sterner duties free,
In the glory of the sand dunes and the sunshine and the sea.

PHILIP ARNOLD LA VIE.

CHAPTER IV

DOWN BARNEGAT WAY

A scoffer once said that the south Jersey pines
Were outside of God's geographical lines,
As drawn when he gave Terra Firma its birth,
That he placed all his lines on the valleys and mountains,
And made all his ornaments flowers and fountains,
And left the pines out of inhabitant earth.

For the valleys and mountains he issued his vetoes
Against them as harbours of Jersey mosquitoes,
And banished them down to the swamps and the pine,
To whom he left simply the life-giving breeze,
As it floated along from the breath of the seas,
And tinctured the woods with the smell of the brine.

AARON E. BALLARD.

HOW many have been the tales, romantic, tragic, gay, sombre, that have been woven or enacted around picturesque Barnegat Lighthouse! How many the vessels saved from destruction on the treacherous shoals by its friendly light! How many have been those poor unfortunates who, despite its warning, have been smashed to pieces on one of the most dangerous bars along the Atlantic seaboard. Numerous the hunters who have gazed

upon its solitude, and uncountable the anglers who have fished around its weatherbeaten base and the waters to the south of it. Situated on a desolate spit of sand, surrounded by vast salt marshes, the light and its few little houses, called by the ironical name of Barnegat City, is typical of southern Jersey and its inhabitants—exposed to sunshine or storm, it leads a solitary existence, but a hardy one.

When, in late summer, the mercury rises steadily by the hour, and the tired and hot city dwellers yearn for the seashore, where even there it isn't the acme of coolness, what more natural than that Phil, Billy, and I, though our homes be by the sea, should seek the cool winds and the restfulness of Barnegat, and cruise whither the spirit moved us?

So, one morning early, after a hot and restless night spent tossing about in bed, robed more or less as our great forefather, Adam, might have been, Billy and I pulled up in the car in front of Phil's domicile and found him awaiting us. Bag and baggage, not forgetting of course the fishing tackle, *sine qua non* a Barnegat expedition is complete, and the humble .20-gauge (for the mud hen and snipe season opened in a few days) we turned the car southward with a sigh that bespoke how much we regretted leaving behind civilized clothing and "parlour manners."

Phil is a temperamental sort of chap—writes

poetry and all that; I'm fond of music; and as for Billy, well, he's just human. He's a fellow who takes things as a matter of course, so Phil and I knew we could depend on him not to throw cold water on any effulgences to which we might be inspired.

Soon Seaside Park was espied off the starboard mudguard, and we came to anchor in a garage, near where lay my cruiser, *Nepenthe.* I named her after a magic potion used by the ancient Egyptians to make them forget their cares and misfortunes, and well has she proved her name.

> *Nepenthe* is a drincke of soverayne grace
> Devized by the Gods to asswage
> Harts grief, and bitter gall away to chace.

It took quite some time to row all the duffle out in the dinghy, for we didn't know when we were to return, much less cared, and we had brought supplies and clothing accordingly. Looking back on the trip, if I remember rightly, I wore no other garment than one single solitary shirt during the greater part of the time, and it was most comfortable, I can assure you.

All was soon aboard, and we headed out through the draw, even the little dinghy skipping and bouncing along behind us as if rejoicing at once more being free.

After a little while we picked up Barnegat Light off the port bow and Billy descended to "rustle grub." Beyond the inlet the bay broadened out and then narrowed again, always bordered by those great salt marshes which the bird gunner knows and loves so well. We could not refrain from tarrying a short time at Sedge Island where, during the previous winter, that which Billy and I hadn't done to the black ducks wasn't worth chronicling. It made us so homesick, we were forced to leave.

Billy and I thereupon entered the cabin for our midday repast, Phil remaining on deck as pilot.

> I am off to southern Jersey,
> For the marshes and the bay. . . .

came floating down to us, and several biscuits went flying up the hatchway, after which we finished our meal in peace.

"He's at it again," grumbled Bill. "What was the use of bringing the Victrola?"

Then I took the wheel while Phil ate, and by the time he had finished, and the dishes had been cleared up, Beach Haven's water tank appeared in the distance.

I might tell here of a little idea I have used on board the *Nepenthe* with much success that brother sportsmen may find of some advantage.

On the treacherous Florida reefs I learned from experience that enamelware dishes and plates were the only satisfactory kind for my use. In rough water, despite the plate rack, it always seemed as if one or more of these obstreperous utensils found their way to the cabin floor, where they reposed, usually in small pieces. The enamelware vessels stood any amount of knocking about and were always in good condition.

In a small cruiser, where you are your own captain, engineer, chief cook, and bottle washer, it behooves you to dispense with as much as possible the arduous labour attendant upon dish washing. To overcome this, I wove a small mesh net, something on the order of those frequently used by our fair sisters when shopping. As soon as the meal is finished, all the dishes and cups are placed in this net and towed behind the boat. The action of the water performs the duty of "scraping" the plates. After a few minutes of this towing the dishes are removed, washed thoroughly in hot water, and put away until the next meal. By this method the galley sink is not cluttered up with particles of food, and the hot water, which is always limited to the amount one can boil in the kettle, is not wasted.

"Let's pick up Hal and Lew for a couple of days at Little Egg Inlet," someone suggested, and we

readily assented, turning the nose of the *Nepenthe* toward shore. We ran up the narrow thoroughfare belonging to the Little Egg Harbour Yacht Club and, as luck would have it, found Lew sitting on the dock, lazily swinging his feet over the water. He needed no second urging so I walked uptown with him to buy some additional supplies.

Hal wouldn't be home until that evening, so we were forced to wait until his arrival before starting. Lew and I took a refreshing swim while Billy and Phil slept, and the time passed quickly enough.

Hal finally arrived, beaming, and loaded from scalp to toe. We welcomed him with open arms, for, be it known, our efforts in the matter of cuisine were not to be compared with his. We have often thought that Hal missed his vocation. He most certainly should have been the head *chef* at *Armenonville* along the famous Champs Élysées.

Like all good cooks, he went to the cuddy at once, and rattled and banged the pots around while Lew headed the boat southward toward the Seahaven Light. There, half an hour later, we anchored back of the point of cedars.

We told stories far into the night, and I thought, many times, of the glorious days of a certain springtime, long past, when Teddy, Stead, Art, Charlie, and I had discovered, as we like to say, this wonderful fishing ground.

The next morning, early, found us casting into the tide rip and shouting to make ourselves heard above the screams and cries of hundreds of sea-gulls which, hovering over a vast school of weakfish, were swooping down to pick up the pieces of bait left by the voracious tide-runners.

Why sing the praises of those big orange-finned weaks, or of the gamy channel bass who makes his home along those sandy reaches? Why attempt to picture that vast country of sand-dunes and sea when to see it means to appreciate it? Why descant on the miles of marsh islands to the westward of Little Egg, where the plover and yellow legs are as numerous as snowflakes in winter, and the saucy blackduck quacks and dives in every salt-hole, when the mere thought drives one frantic? Why—but no more "whys," or this tale would be left unfinished and I would turn my footsteps toward "the tides of Barnegat."

We ran the scale from channel bass down to a fifty-pound, cow-nosed ray. This specimen (*Rhinoptera bonasus*), which fell to my rod, was the first one of its kind I had ever seen. When it seized my bait and rushing seaward leaped high in air, I thought I had hooked a whipray, and when I beached it, would still have thought so had not its colour been a darkish brown, void of the yellow spots prominent in the southern variety. The

natives call them stingrays, but I have caught stingrays at Little Egg which differed materially from the cow-nosed ray and the Florida stingray. One can never be quite sure what he will catch in Jersey waters! A tarpon was taken a few years ago off Asbury Park, and one also at Bradley Beach. The former fish decorates to-day the walls of the Asbury Park Fishing Club.

It was the time of the full moon and often we sat late into the night, gazing out upon the dancing waters and the millions of stars overhead, too wrapped in our own thoughts even to fish.

There was a little creek, I remember, up which at the close of day we were wont to anchor. The first few years of our pilgrimages to Little Egg we were unaware of its existence. But one September, when hard pressed for a good harbour, safe from the tempestuous fury of a wild nor'easter, we ran across it by accident.

The mouth of the creek, set in a great marsh island, was narrow. A boat passing a few hundred yards distant would not notice the opening. And to make matters more difficult, a long sandbar blocked almost the entire entrance. But there was a channel, containing a bare four feet of water, and by careful manipulation one might safely navigate the treacherous portal and gain the deeper waterway beyond.

For nearly a mile the creek wound in and out amongst the marsh, then suddenly widened out into a little basin, where another rivulet flowed to join it. To our great astonishment we found this little land-locked retreat to contain a depth of water amounting in some places to more than forty feet! And the "lusty winds might blow, let them blow," and the "stormy seas might roll, let them roll," but "we poor sailors" always lay calm and sheltered up Little Sheepshead, no matter how great the fury outside.

Here appeared to be a great gathering place for *Micropogon undulatus*, the scrappy little croaker. At nights, after everything had been cleared up, or if the fishing at the inlet had been slack that day, we would take up positions on various parts of the *Nepenthe*, and with our light bait rods, seek to lure some of these fine little fighters from the gurgling tide.

While supper was being prepared, one of us usually would row over to the shore, and wade about the marsh, catching a pail full of fiddler crabs and luscious fat shrimp, the favourite diet of the croakers, and which abounded all along the grassy edges and flats. Our evening's sport was thus always augmented by fresh bait, an important factor in all fishing.

At times the fun was fast and furious, especially

on the incoming tide, when the croakers would come out from their hiding places beneath the banks and congregate in the big swirl formed where the other creek joined Little Sheepshead.

Of the many varieties of small fish I prefer the croaker as to gameness. He puts up a hard fight, darting back and forth with a vigour and agility that is surprising for a fish of his size. Frank, one night, played a croaker on cotton thread for fifteen minutes, an extremely sporty exhibition. And the croaker is not to be scorned as a table delicacy. Whether fried, broiled, baked, or in a chowder, he should satisfy the most fastidious *connoisseur* of sea food.

His shape, in a way, reminds one of a channel bass. In fact, I once saw a channel bass weighing only six pounds, and at first I believed it to be a large croaker. In weight, though, there is a marked difference. The average croaker runs from one to three pounds, while a four- to six-pound fish may be counted extremely large.

But croakers were not the only finny denizens of Little Sheepshead. School weakfish, sea bass, fluke, kingfish, small striped bass; in fact, nearly every variety of the smaller brethren were taken by us at different times and tides. I must not forget our omnipresent friends, the skates and dogfish, for they were *always* with us.

"Much as we dislike to, I'm afraid we'll have to leave, boys," Hal and Lew informed us one morning, so we ran them back to Beach Haven and bade them a sad farewell. We were not to see them again until late in the fall, when once more it was fated that the channel bass should feel the barbs of our O'Shaughnessy's, and the snipe go careening seaward out of reach of our .20-gauges.

"Well," remarked Phil, after we had left the boys, "where shall it be now?"

Where shall we adventure, to-day that we're afloat,
Wary of the weather and steering by a star?
Shall it be to Africa, a-steering of the boat,
To Providence, or Babylon, or off to Malabar?

"It makes no difference to me," I replied; "our time is our own, to do with as we please. What do you think, Bill?"

"I was thinking it might be nice to pay a visit to Hartie and the boys down at Corson's; we've been promising to come down all summer for some of that black drum fishing. It's about seventy-odd miles away, I think, but that makes no difference."

"An excellent suggestion!" cried Phil and I; "it will be fine to see them all again!"

So once more to the southward we steered the old *Nepenthe* and once more we three were her sole masters. Through the waters known as Great

Bay, Shooting Thorofare, Grassy Bay, and so on down, we plowed along the channel widening and narrowing as it wound its way ever between the great marshes. Here and there a school of frightened mullet leaped along the surface, evidently pursued by a large weak or some other fish—always something new and interesting, but always the same great marshes on all sides.

At last in the distant haze vague shapes began to take form, which, as we drew nearer, resolved themselves into the skyline of Atlantic City. Shortly after we were navigating the choppy waters of Absecon Inlet, on the farther side of which lay the famous pleasure resort.

As our stock of provisions had been somewhat depleted, we deemed it expedient to stop off here and replenish them, so accordingly ran into Gardener's Basin, where we tied up to a dock.

Billy and I had been familiar with Atlantic City since childhood, and were acquainted with every street and byway, which we could have traversed blindfolded. As we rolled up Florida Avenue, our yachting caps askew, we felt very much like three tars on shore leave.

At the first store we left our order, to be filled during our absence, and hailing a passing machine, "toured" the city, enjoying the sights.

But from the manner in which people gazed at

us, I should have said that *we* were the sights. I felt like one, I know; no collar or tie, unwashed and with a two weeks' growth of beard; Phil looking like a Solomon Islander; and Billy with a foul-smelling pipe clamped firmly between his teeth, the effluvium from which nearly suffocated me.

It was with relief that we returned once more to the good ship *Nepenthe* and found two soap boxes loaded down with the necessities of life awaiting us. Presently we were on our way, and for several miles continued along through, as Billy expressed it, "Atlantic City's back yard."

It was more like a canal than a thoroughfare, the channel winding in and out behind houses and under bridges until I could almost believe I was back in that Old World city where the villainous Othello ended forever the career of the fair Desdemona.

But Atlantic City dropped behind at last and we struck out into the vast salt marshes that extended from there in an unbroken line to Cape May.

Hour after hour we slipped along over the glassy waters, while Phil composed poetry, I thrummed the ukulele, and Billy sat at the wheel, his ever-present pipe clamped firmly between his teeth, gazing off into the distance, a dreamy expression upon his countenance.

"Say, old boy," he suddenly said, turning to me, "how large would you say that tarpon was I lost at the viaduct last winter?"

I could not refrain from laughing, for, strange to relate, my thoughts had been traversing those same far-away turquoise channels.

Now Ocean City gradually took shape and we knew our destination to be but a matter of an hour or so farther. After we had left this place behind the bird life on the marsh began to increase noticeably.

Great blue herons stepped meditatively across the flats or rose heavily into the air at our approach. Mud-hens leaped from the banks and made swiftly away as we rounded a bend. I was ready for the next one and cracked him over before he had time to go far.

"Mud-hen for dinner! Um-m-m—um!" murmured Phil in epicurean bliss. As for Billy and I, we knew only too well the luscious repast furnished by these toothsome rails.

After that we took turns, crouching on the bow, .20 in hand, pasting away at every mud-hen that was indiscreet enough to expose itself, though I blush to say our "missed" exceeded our "dead" by an *exceedingly large* majority.

Our penchant for fricasseed fowl led us, however, as you shall see, into difficulty.

I was below in the cabin, secreting within me the largest portion of a bottle of ginger ale, when an excited exclamation from Billy caused me to swallow half the contents of the bottle at one gulp.

"Quick! Come up here!" he cried in a stage whisper; and I heard Phil muttering something about, "If I didn't see it with my own eyes, I wouldn't believe it!"

I emerged, to see before me a great mud flat some mile or more in length literally covered with snipe! They were of all sizes and quantities; jacksnipe, willet, teeters, killdeers, curlew, all running about and jabbing their bills into the mud in search of fat snails and other pabulum. And to cap the climax, in the centre of this great bird assembly was feeding a flock of about fifty of the fattest yellowlegs I had ever seen. These I singled out immediately.

Not stopping to untie the dinghy, we ran the *Nepenthe* close to the flat, supposing the water fairly deep. I took a flying leap off the bow, gun in hand, and immediately disappeared up to my waist in mud. Scrambling out as best I might, I stalked the birds with great caution. But a flock of killdeer who were nearer to me than the yellowlegs, suddenly took alarm, and scared up my quarry with them.

I rose to shoot, and at once went sailing into the

air, to land on the pyloric portion of my anatomy in the soft ooze. From this graceful position I had presence of mind to fire, and killed two yellowlegs which I recovered after a great deal of floundering.

When I got back to the boat, lo and behold, she was stuck fast! We reversed the engine. We pushed. We shoved. We lowered our naked bodies into the tepid water, and with shoulders against the bow, exerted all our efforts to dislodge her. But to no avail. And the tide was *falling!* We even attempted to kedge her off with the anchor, but she refused to move an inch. The only thing remaining for us to do was to wait until the next high water, so we resigned ourselves to the inevitable.

The tide fell lower and lower, and the boat gradually keeled over on her side, until, at an angle of forty-five degrees, she stopped, as did also the tide.

Phil and Billy were asleep on the port wall, and from my position in the cockpit I could see the mud, only a few inches from the deck.

That was the longest ebb tide I think I have ever known, but, like the proverbial worm, it finally turned and the *Nepenthe* gradually but surely resumed her normal position. With the engine racing full speed astern and all three of us shoving with poles, we finally dislodged her and

bade farewell to that accursed flat with its still more accursed snipe, which, upon our departure, returned in greater numbers than before, or so it seemed to me.

By the time we had left our bird friends far behind Corson's Inlet lay off our port bow, and after creeping up the channel, sounding continuously, for it was unmarked, we passed under an antiquated drawbridge, which, if I'm not mistaken, required thirty-five minutes and seven men to swing, and came to anchor opposite Gus Wittkamp's "West Jersey Cottages," so famous in the annals of all good channel bass fishermen.

It may occur to the reader, as it did to me the first time I went to Corson's, to ask why Gus named his place the *West* "Jersey Cottages" when they are right on the Atlantic seaboard.

In 1664, the Duke of York gave to his two friends, Lord Berkeley and Sir George Carteret, formerly governor of the Island of Jersey in the English Channel, the province in America, which was named New Jersey in honour of Carteret. In 1674, the proprietors divided their province into East and West Jersey by a diagonal line extending from the northwest portion of the state to the southwest portion, at a point well above Corson's Inlet, thereby making all the southern part of New Jersey West Jersey in reality. This little ex-

planation may help to clarify a question which I have been frequently asked, and which at first puzzled me.

Hartie, Stead, Teddy, and Harold were having supper when we arrived, but they rushed down to greet us with open arms. They were tanned the colour of old mahogany, and as brawny as so many Samsons, for they had been camping on the dunes since May, and the outdoor life had done for them what it does for everyone else: made them robust and fairly bursting with health. The hug that Teddy gave me nearly cracked a rib, and I saw Billy nursing his fingers where Stead had gripped them.

We all repaired to Gus's bounteous board and finished supper together. Then we sat around a crackling log fire, for the nights now were beginning to take on a chill, and told fish stories. All brother sportsmen will know what this means. The first few anecdotes are no doubt true, then someone draws a trifle upon his imagination, and the next thing one knows the gathering becomes a veritable orgy of exaggeration. Perhaps the most authentic bit of evidence produced by our hosts during the evening was a photograph of a *ziphioid* whale which came ashore there several years ago. This particular *ziphioid* was an extremely rare species of the whale family and an inhabitant

of New Zealand waters. This mammal was dissected by some scientists from Philadelphia, and created much interest among ichthyologists at that time.

Just about bedtime someone came in and reported that the black drum had struck in at Cedar Beach, across the inlet. Captain N—— had taken one of forty pounds and several others had lost big fish.

This was good news, and as the tide would be right early next morning, we made plans to be on the grounds before sunrise.

The dawn found us in "surfmen's formation," ranged along the sands in various poses and at various distances; some in the undertow, some on the seething bar, some farther up the beach. I can never look at surf anglers without being impressed by the picturesqueness of their attitudes. Each is filled with the hope that it will be *his* bait which the wary denizens of the deep will seize, and this thought is registered in their postures with psychological effect.

With baits ranging from mossbunkers and shedders down to the humble clam, we conjured up all our magic charms and potions, and implored the sea-gods to send us a drum. And they did. A shout from Teddy proclaimed that a school had worked in and that he had hooked the first fish.

The black drum, though the average fish runs heavier than the channel bass, are not as gamy as the latter. After the first few runs they become more or less of a dead weight, and any one with a small degree of skill should have no difficulty in bringing one to beach.

This fish (*Pogonias cromis*), known under the various names of "sheepshead," "porgy drum," "gray drum," etc., is a heavy, stolid-looking member of the Pisces tribe. A large hump on its back does not add materially to its gracefulness. It has stripes running perpendicularly down its side, which as a rule fade after death. It may be distinguished from its relative, the channel bass, by the presence of "chin barbles" or whiskers—similar to those possessed by the catfish—and the absence of the black spot on the tail, so prominent in the "red bulldog." Its colour is a dark gray, sometimes almost black.

There has been a great controversy among surf fishermen as to the exact definition of a *red* drum. Many well-known anglers have taken a species of drum which *differs from either the channel bass or black drum.* This particular fish is *red* in colour, has chin barbles but no spots on the tail, and is hunchbacked after the manner of the black drum. Anglers who have caught this fish claim that it is the real red drum. Scientists, however,

recognize only the black drum and the channel bass, stating that the latter is the red drum.

I have taken two of these much-disputed fish. Certainly it is *not* the channel bass I have been accustomed to, and differs materially from *Pogonias cromis*. Whether it is a colour phase of the black drum, due to climatic conditions or sex changes, or an entirely distinct species of drum, I do not know. A mounted specimen of this fish, labelled, "Red Drum," hangs in the trophy room of the Asbury Park Fishing Club, where any one may view it and draw his own conclusions.

We caught six black drum at Cedar Beach that morning, one a fish weighing sixty-five pounds. This was the largest black drum I have ever seen, though there have been instances of fish caught weighing over eighty. There is every reason to believe that this fish well exceeds one hundred pounds. Frank once fought a fish at New Inlet for more than eight hours. What it was will never be known, for after an all-night battle in absolute darkness the line parted just at daybreak. It may have been a giant drum or . . . who knows what? The sea is very strange.

"How would you fellows like a little blue-fishing to-morrow morning?" proposed Hartie that evening, which suggestion was eagerly welcomed.

Anything savouring of angling was always an irresistible temptation.

We betook ourselves back to the *Nepenthe*, and the boys to their tent, an elaborate contrivance on the dunes a few hundred yards away.

As I rolled into my berth I could not help but muse on what a happy life it was we were leading in this far-off corner of South Jersey, surrounded by naught but sand and sea; monotonous for some, but for me, absolute contentment.

The next morning found us putting out to sea in one of the boys' sea skiffs, the staunch little *Seabrighter* taking the waves like a cork. Away to the south we headed, hunting for "blues," passed Avalon and Townsend's Inlet, until the southernmost point of Jersey could be dimly seen in the mist.

But why tell more? Already this tale has grown far beyond what I originally intended. My pen seemed to write on of its own accord, and I fear 'twould still continue did I not check it.

Be it enough to say that we angled to our heart's content, from the offshore banks to the wonderful channel bass grounds of those lonely inlets. And luck attended us always.

We at last turned home, filled with mingled regrets and gladness. Even though, on the return voyage, I fell from a drawbridge in Atlantic City,

striking the timbers of the stringpiece in my descent, it mattered not; the outdoors had given me a constitution that quickly recovered.

It was a trip that shall live forever in our memories—the marshes, the wild life, the bay, and always, the ever-sounding sea.

I love the sea, if only to stand and gaze at its great, majestic splendour.

I once fell into conversation with an old fisherman along the beaches, and together we stood for several hours looking at the surf.

"You know," he remarked, "the waves remind me of our lives. Some of 'em comes up the beach higher'n others and makes their mark; some of 'em don't git nowheres a-tall. But no matter whether they makes their mark, er fails absolute, they all gotta return to where they come from."

Which seemed to me pretty good philosophy.

CHAPTER V

THE TIGER OF THE SEA

AS WE climbed out of the car at the end of the sixty-mile run Captain Sim met us at the dock.

"You'd best put up at the Crab to-night, and run down to Little Egg in the morning," opined the captain. "She's swinging around to the nor'-east'ard, and it looks to me like rain and a blow by nightfall."

The old fisherman—the adjective indicates wisdom in things piscatorial rather than extreme senility—cast a weather-wise though somewhat grimy eye heavenward.

"On the contrary, I like the looks of it," he replied. "It will be calm enough to hold on the outside, and that's all I ask. A dash of rain won't harm us so long as the fish don't mind."

This was final, so without further discussion we threw our duffle bags and tackle into the cat boat and in ten minutes we were chugging toward the Bay, with the poles and buoys which marked the narrow channel sliding by on either side.

It was a desolate enough prospect to any eye but that belonging to a surfman. Low-hanging, gray clouds, with thin wisps of white below them, rolled out of the north. The leaden water heaved in uneasy, oily swells, and as the bow of our small craft slapped into them, the salt spray flew the length of the boat. Behind us, the island, a narrow spit of sand a half mile across at its widest part and some twenty miles in length, reached away to the north until it melted into sky and water. The dark roofs of the small buildings which constituted the hamlet and the yellow dunes which hemmed them round were fast disappearing from view, and this detracted nothing from the solitude of our environment. Yes, to the average eye it would have been a far from cheerful scene, but we were anglers, anglers of the deepest dye, and the bow of our boat was headed toward the finest bit of beach from a surf fisherman's standpoint that could be found in two hundred miles of coast.

And so we were steeped in that deep content which comes to fishermen and to others who find their happiness in normal pursuits. I don't know whether the art of angling tends to the development of faith, hope, and contentment, or whether it is that individuals who possess these attributes just naturally take to angling. In

short, I am not sure whether a man is an optimist because he is a fisherman, or a fisherman because he is a believer in this cheerful doctrine. But I do know that all good fishermen are optimists. A glance inward does not answer the question of cause or effect, for one of my earliest recollections is of being dragged from a shallow brook where I had been tempted to the pursuit of a school of shiners. I have been assured that upon this occasion I voiced my complaint loudly, but it gives me some satisfaction to believe that my bellowing was an expression of dissatisfaction because of my removal from the scene of activities, rather than in a complaint of the wetting. Could I be assured that this belief is correct it would go far toward answering the question I have brought up.

This, however, is to be a tale of action, of doing rather than of philosophizing, though in actual fishing there is frequently more of the latter in it than of the former, which no doubt is as it should be.

As I have stated, the threatening aspect of the weather served in no way to dampen the spirits of the party, nor did it I believe affect the captain's equable nature. He was a true descendant of those piratical ancestors who in the early days—so at least the story goes—were wont to attach a lantern to the tail of a mule, turning the animal loose to roam the beach at will, thus tempting the

unwary mariner to ruin in the breakers offshore. I have myself sampled a bottle or two of rare old wine and cognac which was commonly supposed to have been salvaged from the wreck of one of these foreign craft, and though knowing the temper of the animal in question, and harbouring as I do strong doubts as to the possibility of inducing him to dangle a lighted lantern, as herein stated, or in any other way, so far as that goes, still the proof of the pudding has always been in the tasting.

Whether or not the tales handed down concerning those early island men are true, I do know that they bred a line of hardy descendants. With no covering over his body but a single cotton shirt, our captain stood at the wheel, swinging to the heave of the boat and minding not the spume that flew about him. He was short, and inclined to stoutness, and he was exceedingly red as to his face and hands. Not a heroic figure, by any means, but solid and safe looking, and just the type I should choose to pilot my craft with a northeaster brewing.

When we had beaten past the point, where a handful of dwarfish cedars broke the monotony of gray sand and marsh, and where it was rumoured, that a chest or two of pirate gold lay buried, we felt the full force of the wind and tide. It was only an eight-mile run to the cove close to the end of the

island, which was our destination, but we were glad enough to reach its sheltered waters, and still happier to be deposited on the beach, with the aid of a square-ended sneak boat, which Captain Sim called his tender.

Here before us lay a flat sand spit reaching into the ocean, with the bay on one side and blue water on the other, wind swept, and with nought in the way of shelter against storm or rain. The wind does blow in those parts, let me tell you. Always, excepting upon rare, calm days, and in wet weather, the fine sand drives steadily across the point, hissing as it goes.

By the time our small silk tent had been elevated, and staked out tightly, and a hasty meal cooked and eaten, darkness had fallen. And with night came a patter of raindrops, as the captain had promised. Yet our enthusiasm was not effected in the slightest, for we were prepared with oilskins, and with the hip boots which are a part of every surfman's equipment.

We were baiting with squid and bunker, each man to his choice, and from the first cast both baits brought moderate success so far as small fish were concerned. Weakfish and croakers were landed frequently enough to keep our interest alive, and to make us hope for better things, particularly as the tide was fast approaching that

condition known as flood, at which time the bass were most apt to be on the feed at this particular spot.

After a bit the sky cleared somewhat, and one could catch glimpses of the moon now and then as it dodged between scurrying clouds. At one of these periods of near moonlight I heard a shout from my nearest neighbour. My own line happened to be retrieved at the time, and I lost no time in hurrying in his direction, for I knew that something out of the ordinary was doing. Sure enough, I found my companion bent double, with both hands clenched around a violently jerking rod.

"Bass?" I inquired, excitedly, when I had reached him.

"Feels that way," he answered, jerkily. "Either bass or submarine. He took it on the jump just before I yelled, and most of my line is gone already. He must be a whopper."

Just then he uttered a disappointed, "damn!" and I saw his rod straighten and the line go limp. Dejectedly he reeled in, while I uttered commiserations, for at such times as these the world carries a dark and gloomy aspect to your fisherman.

"I don't know how it happened," he complained, as he guided the line upon the reel. "I gave him no slack, that's certain. The hook must have pulled loose."

The last remaining few feet of line came in, and the mystery was explained, to me at least, for we found the entire rig cleanly severed from the line.

"Probably a shark," I hazarded. "How did he bite?"

"He didn't bite at all," my friend replied. "He just grabbed the bait and left like the proverbial bat. I thought at the time it was an almighty hard strike for a channel bass, but I was counting on bass, and shark didn't occur to me."

"I believe I'll tie on about six feet of wire, anyway," I said. "If it was a shark there are probably more of 'em about, and I wouldn't mind a little run in with a man-eater just for exercise. I'm getting a bit chilly without my sweater."

Had I known what lay before me the chances are I would have relied on the short leader, even though I lost an outfit or two. It would have saved me a lot of misery—as we say in the west—but then again I might have been robbed of an experience which proved to be unique in a way, even epochal.

I have my own opinions concerning the festive shark, which, while they may differ considerably from the impressions which prevail among the public at large, are held nevertheless by a fast-growing body of sportsmen who love the surge and run of a powerful fish. I grant you that the

shark, be he of the hammer head, the leopard, the blue, the sand, or any other species, is neither a very handsome creature to gaze upon, nor is he the sort of a companion one would choose for a dip in the surf. Yet he has his good points. First of these in value, from the angler's standpoint, is a penchant for attempting to yank into the brine, when hooked, the fisherman who has done the hooking. Secondly is his lack of that mental capacity which tells a fish when he is licked, and thirdly is the fact that whether served under his true name, or disguised as gray fish, he is far from being a disagreeable morsel to the palate.

True, a fish of this species less than forty pounds' weight will fail to put up a very extended battle, contenting himself generally with one or two lusty runs. But among sharks, a specimen of this weight would be immature; a baby fish, almost. Take a husky young fellow, a youth or maiden shark of say a hundred to three hundred pounds, hook him to your heaviest surf outfit, and you will have a fight on your hands that will bring smoke from your reel and a song of gladness to your heart. The really grown ups, fish of say five hundred pounds and upward, why these chaps will ordinarily start right out to sea and keep on going, wondering, no doubt, what it is that is tickling their palates.

The shark is feared and disliked by most people, I believe, because of the unwholesome reputation he has of possessing a fondness for human flesh. And yet I am not sure that he deserves the evil name which he has gained. At least not in American waters. For a great many years there was a reward of a thousand dollars offered for any authentic case of a shark attacking a human being on the Atlantic coast. Only in one year was a case of this sort recorded, and it happened that a half dozen persons were attacked in a single season at points between Barnegat and Long Branch. The opinion now prevails that these deaths were all caused by a single man-eating specimen (*carcharodon*) which in some way had acquired a taste for human flesh.

Grizzlies, panthers, and several varieties of African carnivorae have a well-established liking for the same dish, and yet none of these animals is taboo among sportsmen. I will admit that I would not enjoy a dip in waters that I knew to be infested with sharks, but by the same token I would hesitate to play tag with a silvertip.

I do not consider the shark an entirely disagreeable object to the eye, but, to the contrary, I find him a rather graceful creature in contour, and unique and interesting, to say the least. On the end of a line none of the large game fish of northern waters

is quicker in his movements, or will cut up half so many didoes. He is always willing to entertain the angler, which is a lot more than can be said of several fish which boast a far sweeter reputation, and after all it is the fighting ability of a fish that interests us most. The fact, if it is a fact—that he is a dangerous creature, a man-eater, might even add to the shark's attraction as a straight sporting proposition among red-blooded anglers.

Because, as I have suggested, I am fully as interested in the pursuit and capture of these so-called man-eaters as I am in any other hard-fighting fish, on the night I have dwelt upon I attached a six-foot length piano wire to a number 9-0 hook, and, baiting it with a substantial strip of mossbunker, I hunted trouble and found it.

By the time my rig was made up I found the tide running strong, north of the rip, and so I wended my way toward a deep hole a few hundred yards below, which I had fished with success during a previous trip to this point.

Here I cast my bait, and waited expectantly for what might come. A half-dozen times I felt the nibbling of small fish who found the side of bunker entirely beyond their ability to gorge. Only once did I succeed in hooking a fish, a large fluke, which I landed, and re-baiting, cast again into the hole.

The moon which had been mounting in the

heavens, while still obliterated for the most part by the banks of cloud which swept southward, shone with greater brilliancy as it came more directly overhead. Notwithstanding the infrequency of strikes or touches, I found a deal of pleasure in the mere fact of being there. Yet it had been a long and strenuous day, and I had decided, after a glance at my illuminated watch—which showed twenty minutes to eleven—to quit the beach at the hour and seek what rest I could find until the turn of the tide.

This entirely sensible plan was not to be carried out, however, for scarcely had I replaced the watch in my pocket when there came a strike which almost tore the rod from my somewhat lax grasp. I was fully awake on the instant, and I put my weight on the rod in order to set the hook firmly, an action which was scarcely required. There was only one fish in these waters which could give a strike like this, and only one fish, with the exception of the tuna, which could take out line at the rate with which it was disappearing. Like the blow of a sledge he had smashed into the bait and, irresistible as a six-cylinder car, he was tearing out to sea. I put all my weight and strength against the rod, and bore down upon the brake with both thumbs, but this fellow minded it not in the slightest. I have hooked good fish in

my time, of a hundred species, but never before nor since have I felt greater power than was in this creature.

There was a thousand feet of twelve-thread line upon my reel, and a good rod to back it up, but they seemed as a spider's gossamer, and a waving reed when opposed to this fellow who had taken my bait. The moon had retired behind a bank of cloud, and I had no way of marking the course of my quarry excepting by the feel of the line. Once or twice I sensed a sudden surge, as though he had broken water, but there was no way of knowing, for the sound of the splash would be drowned in the roar of waters. I was filled with the joy of combat, and I must have given voice to my exultation in a war whoop, for one of my companions came running, and was at my side, speaking words which I took no notice of, for my thoughts were all of the fish.

By the feel I knew there could be little more than a hundred feet of line remaining, and this would be gone within the space of a few seconds unless I could turn him. There is one expedient, and one only, which can be used at times like this. This is the action known as pumping. Not the slow upward heave, which is used to regain line when one's quarry is exhausted, but a series of strong jerks. Not infrequently the hook tears

loose during the act, and frequently your fighting fish will mind it not in the slightest. But if he happens to be tongue hooked, and sometimes when he is not, he will turn under the punishment.

I tried it now. With all the force I could exert I heaved upward, a dozen times or more, and, praise heaven, I felt him ease up in his mad rush, and turn parallel to the beach.

As I followed, stumbling through the surf, I breathed a sigh of relief. Humouring him to the extent that I pumped no longer, but still keeping a heavy pressure, I regained my line foot by foot, until there was fifty yards or so on the reel. Then I felt better. For twenty minutes or more he kept his course, while I followed after as best I could. Once or twice I stumbled over driftwood, and once I fell full length in the surf as my boot struck against a floating board. All this time the fish had been fighting the tide as well as the rod, and now he turned of his own volition, and by the time we had worked back to the point I had spooled a third of my line.

It had been a trifle chilly standing there with the spray from the breakers saturating my clothing and adding to the coolness of the night air, but now I found myself hot and perspiring as on a day in August.

My companion had followed me, and now as I

gained a moment's respite I asked him the time.

"One thirty-five," he answered. "You have been at him more than two hours. Don't you think you can beach him?"

"I can try, at least," I replied. "This is longer than I ever fought a fish from the beach before, but by the same token I never before had hold of such a fighter as this. Yes, I should be able to bring him in."

Up to this time I had given the fish pretty much his own way, simply putting on the line all the resistance it would bear, and attempting to tire him by his own exertions, which had been almost continuous. Now I started a slow, steady pumping. And then I wished I hadn't, for again he started a rush seaward, as though freshly awake to his predicament. Again he sent the rod swaying and jerking, as he clove through the water in surging plunges, and again I thought I had lost him. But judging at least from my own condition the strain of the contest was beginning to tell, for he turned at last, and headed up the beach, but still battling for all that was in him.

"Lord, what a fighter!" my companion ejaculated. "He must be as big as a horse."

By this time I felt that I had some slight control over my quarry. At least this last run seemed to show that he was losing somewhat in strength, and

so I kept him on the go, though myself so tired with the unceasing strain that my movements had become almost automatic. When he tried to sulk, I pumped him, and invariably he would be off again, sometimes on these occasions swimming straight out to sea, at others darting either up or down the beach. I had but two thoughts: one to keep the fish moving until he was exhausted, the other to hold him away from the rip. For once in this sea-bearing current I knew that no power of reel or line could force him to turn.

When four o'clock came my companion, after advising me to break the line, on being requested to remove himself to a certain torrid region from whence none returneth, took his departure. And then I was sorry to be left alone, and was almost tempted to heed his advice. Doubtless I would have done so if he had not muttered something about a "damn fool" as he stumbled up the beach. I have always been a perverse and a stubborn individual—to which statement my friends will agree—and so I set my teeth, stifled a groan, and leaning back on the rod, again pumped the fish into action.

By this time he was losing no opportunity to sulk, yet always there was a willingness to renew the combat, and an apparent reserve of energy which enabled him to reel off a hundred-yard run

whenever my own strength was sufficiently recovered to egg him on. It seemed to have come to the question of which would break under the strain, the fish or myself.

After a while another acquaintance, and a club member, who had tired of the fishing joined me, and inserting a cigar between my lips lighted it for me. Then he stuck around to watch the doings.

The tide was running in strong again, and with the change the surf had risen considerably. The moon had come out brilliantly at last, lighting up the beach, and making it much easier to mark the location of my fish. I had succeeded in working him to within a hundred feet of shore, where he seemed to lay under the shelving bank that here dropped off into thirty feet of water, yet he kept deep, and always with that irresistible weight against the line. Could I have raised him sufficiently for him to have felt the full effect of the waves, I might have beached the fish at this time, but it was a physical impossibility. I was putting all the force into my attack that my tackle would bear, and almost to the pound I knew its limitations.

As the fish lay there, almost a dead weight on my line, I said to myself, "he is played out, and he will never make another run." But I was to learn better, for shortly, without warning, the line

tightened, and he had taken two hundred yards before I could halt him. Not only this, but that seaward rush had been made with all the irresistible energy which he had displayed in the beginning.

I was disheartened, and almost complete physical exhaustion had come over me. Dawn was just breaking, green moonlight merging with the gray of early morning, while along the eastern horizon a faint suggestion of pink showed above the waves. The ocean had that sullen, leaden appearance which it possesses before a storm and at early morn. As it grew brighter I gazed eagerly into the water, following my taut line, and hoping to see the roll of my quarry, but he was fighting deep now, keeping out of the force of the waves.

There was no question but that I was all in. I had been fairly licked by that fish, and I knew it, yet I felt no malice, nor even did I possess that keen desire to capture the creature which had been my incentive in the beginning, so shortly after six o'clock I called one of my friends from the tent, and to him I surrendered the rod, and staggered up the beach, with the intention of seeking an hour's rest. Had the tent been more than a couple of hundred yards' distant I doubt if I could have made it.

More than once in the past I have searched for adventure and hardship, and it has come to me in more liberal doses than I counted on, and more than once I have been exhausted physically and mentally by sustained endeavour and privation, but never, I believe, have I been more completely "all in" than at this moment. For seven hours and a quarter I had battled with that fish without a moment's respite. A longer fight by hours than I have ever engaged in before, and longer than I shall ever fight another.

When I reached the pup-tent, I crept inside, and falling face downward upon the blankets, without removing my boots, or even the rod belt and bait box, was sound asleep in an instant.

The next moment, it seemed, I was awakened by my tent mate bellowing in my ear:

"Get up! Get up and hustle down to the beach, if you want to see them land your fish!"

I forced my sore and unwilling limbs into action, which so it turned out was wholly unnecessary, for the shout which had aroused my companion was only to apprise us that the quarry had broken free. At the end, with practically all of the line exhausted, the tackle had given way just above the wire leader.

This fish had put up a battle without parallel in the records of our surf-fishing clubs, and one

which for duration I doubt if any fish has exceeded on light tackle. From a quarter before eleven he had waged a stubborn fight throughout the night, and had made his escape at seven-fifteen the following morning: *eight hours and a half later.* The last hour he fought as stubbornly and with almost as much activity as in the beginning. After I relinquished the rod he had made three long runs, taking out six to eight hundred feet of line each time.

That I succeeded in holding him on his first couple of runs I am assured I owe more to luck than to any special ability I may possess as an angler, for I am convinced that no reel or line was ever built strong enough to have checked him had he decided to keep on a straightaway course.

Some there are who have disputed my statement that this fish was a shark on the strength of the fact that no shark has ever been known to hold up his end of a fight with the tenacity that this fish displayed, basing their assumption upon the records of the sharks which have been captured in the past, and forgetting the hundreds of fish which each season break the line on the first rush. Yet shark I believe this fish to have been, and my belief is not groundless, for once, as my quarry swam close inshore, the yellow moon broke through the clouds and I saw a sharp fin cleaving the

"I had a glimpse of a huge shadowy shape."

Showing the marked difference between the Channel Bass and Black Drum. Note the slender, racy lines of the former, and the heavy sluggishness of the latter.

water at about the spot where I judged my captive lay. This is my only proof, but coupled with the actions of this fish, I am satisfied that my surmise is correct, particularly as the several experienced anglers who viewed the combat agree with my belief.

When I returned to the tent I again dropped into a heavy sleep which lasted well into the afternoon, and I minded not that the blues were chasing mullet in the undertow. We had planned to return on the evening of this day, but at the last moment I elected to remain on the beach, for I was primed for a big fish. And so, in the furtherance of this plan, I sorted out a few articles of camping equipment, including the silk shelter tent, and waved my companions good-bye from atop the dune where we had made our camp.

I love the companionship of good friends whose tastes are similar to my own, and there is no surer test of friendship than a camping trip on the beach especially if mosquitoes and green-headed flies are in season. Yet there are times also when I like to be alone, and surely there is no place where one can be so entirely alone and solitary as on a sand beach jutting far out into the ocean.

That evening I caught a blue fish, which I planked to a golden brown on a pine board which had been scrubbed clean by the sand and waves.

And the fat blue, with baked potatoes, corn bread, tea, and fruit, made me a meal which any city gourmand might have envied. For he who has not caught his fish, cleaned them before their colour fades, and cooked them before an open fire while yet the coolness of the salt water is in them, has failed to taste them at their best.

I slept that night on a thick bed of dry moss as grateful to my back as the softest down. The following morning I breakfasted early, and was on the beach before old Geezis had shown his round face above the dunes. It was a large bait I chose this morning: another thick slab of bunker. And I made my cast, and sat and waited, while the sun crept high and warmed my back, and small fish nibbled my bait. Fish I caught: weaks and flounders, and even a kingfish, though how the small-mouthed fellow ever got foul of the point of my hook was a mystery.

A coast guard, from his station four miles above, came in his launch and anchored in the channel to fish for flounders. And he must have brought me luck, for scarce had he dropped a line overboard when there came a hard tug on my rod, and as the hook was set the line shot from the reel.

Then out from the water leaped a long gray shape which shone in the sunlight like silver. Full length he left the water, in a shower of foam,

turning in the air like a porpoise. And the guard in his dinky boat took in the sight, and waved a hand in encouragement.

One long run this fish made, then he turned, and we had it back and forth along the beach for better than an hour. He was an active fellow; quick as a mustang in his movements. Three times he lunged out of the water, as I have seen black bass do in northern lakes. But when he did give up, he came in almost like a log, and the breakers lifted him and swept him into the undertow. Then it was easy enough to grasp the curved tail—though paying close heed to the snapping jaws—and I dragged him to the beach.

According to his length, this shark must have weighed in excess of a hundred pounds. He had given me as interesting a fight as one could wish, and I was satisfied. So then I rolled my equipment into the packsack, and set forth on the seven-mile hike to the village.

There have been times in my own experience when these great tigers of the sea came in close to the undertow, not singly, or in pairs, but in schools, and when a dozen fish could be hooked in the space of an hour or two. One day at Gray Gull Shoals four of us had fished for channel bass from early morning until late afternoon, with no reward for our efforts and perseverance excepting for a

few croakers and weakfish, and even with these smaller fry we had but little success owing to the large baits we were using. About the middle of the ebb tide I heard a shout from one of my friends, and I saw his rod tip whip downward. It was too fast and strong a fish even for a bass, this I knew, and the next second, as his line went slack, my belief was proved correct. There was an immediate reeling in of lines, and a rush to the tackle bags in quest of wire leaders.

Even while adjusting my tackle I glanced up and saw the sharp fin of a great shark close in the undertow, and I made haste to tie on my hook the half of a mossbunker. Scarce had the bait struck the water, in proximity to the spot where I had spied the fin, when I perceived a violent swirl in front of me. That the shark had found the slick from the oily bait, and was in search of the titbit, there was no question, and I moved the leather drag so that it rested under my thumb, and waited in high-keyed expectation. There came a slow jerking on my line, and then it moved outward. I allowed him to run for twenty feet, then put leverage on the reel, and raised my tip. Instantly there came a numbing, smashing strike, and a great porpoise-like form cleft the water before my eyes, and started seaward. Twelve feet long, he was, if an inch, and as he tore through

the water in a succession of plunging leaps I thought I had never seen a more spectacular exhibition. Four hundred feet from shore was a bar, impassable by large fish at low water, and as he came to this point my shark turned abruptly to the right and shot parallel to the shore. And this manœuvre spelled defeat for me, for as he turned his tail came in contact with the wire leader and it parted like a thread.

Far down the beach Bert was fighting a seven-footer, which he landed after a tiring struggle. At the same time, closer to me, Billy—who claims descent from the ancient tribe of Picts—was leaning against a nodding rod, and I had strong hopes for him, for his big reel contained a thousand feet of strong line to which he had affixed an eight-foot leader of twisted wire. Several other fish were hooked at this time, but Billy was fast to the granddaddy of 'em all.

His shark had passed the bar, and with one long run had taken out more than half the line his reel contained, when I laid aside my own outfit and joined him. The shark was still moving straight away, but in a slow, dogged manner, at times turning, to work either up or down the beach. Now the actions of this fellow were unlike those of any other shark I have ever hooked. It was as though, his first panicky rush over with, he was

scarce conscious of the pull, and of the sharp hook imbedded in his jaws. There was no yielding, certainly, not even when he pumped him, and yet there was apparent no real anxiety or desire to escape.

Billy, who had been under the weather for a day or two, was in no condition to undergo a protracted struggle, and at the end of an hour and a half he surrendered the rod to me. For another hour I played the fish, then gave the rod over to Van. At the end, with the line practically exhausted, we attempted to follow the fish out to sea in a small tender brought from the yacht, only to come to grief in the heavy surf.

These personal experiences with sharks show something of the difficulties one is apt to encounter in their pursuit. Yet to me it is worth while, even though an exceedingly small number of those which take the bait are ever beached. The general practice among surf fishermen of severing the line as soon as the species of the fish is assured does not represent the highest grade of sportsmanship to my way of thinking. What matters the loss of a couple of dollars' worth of line, for, after all, the fight is the thing in fishing.

I find as much pleasure in hooking and playing a shark as I do in landing any others among the great game fishes which feed in the surf. I do

admit that it is an expensive pastime, so far as tackle is concerned, but I am satisfied that if the surfman would approach the game properly equipped for this particular fish, a far greater percentage of strikes would be brought to gaff. This question of what constitutes a practicable shark fishing outfit will be dealt with in this chapter.

Each year, I am glad to say, shows an increased interest in shark fishing, and I have no doubt that unless this fish receives a deserved recognition among the surf fishing clubs, that independent associations will be formed with the purpose in view of raising it to its proper pinnacle as a game fish. Let me include in this chapter an extract from an article written by Mr. T. H. Beringer, an experienced surf fisherman, and one among many who consider the shark a most worthy antagonist. In describing his battle with the hundred-and-sixty-pound fish Mr. Beringer says:

"My reel was like a live coal, and while surgeon's plaster protected one thumb at the start this burned through in a flash, and from then on pressing my thumbs against a red-hot stove would have been just as enjoyable. Naturally the general trend of action wended surfward and it was without reluctance that I allowed myself to be submerged, rod, outfit and all. Someone waded out and jammed on a thumb stall for me when the creature's first

mad rush was stopped—with but two hundred feet of line still on the reel. Short, irresistible plunges still straight to sea now followed, each one tearing off twenty or thirty feet of coveted line, and my nerves and thoughts were entirely stampeded. The slightest relaxation on the part of the shark at his end of the line was the signal for me to fight like mad at mine. My entire being was centred on one object—to undermine the strength of my foe as much as possible before he started his second furious rush to sea. So greatly had he impressed his power upon me that I did not doubt for a moment that there would be a second rush. It was impossible to realize that having thrown every ounce of strain upon my outfit that the tackle would stand, I had sapped that tremendous strength of which I was now afraid. Working to the north, with every muscle aching and quivering with the strain, my friend, the enemy, was at last induced to turn and swim parallel with the shore. His movements now were not so swift as formerly, but he proceeded forward with a power that compelled respect and was well-nigh irresistible. Keeping abreast of him and fighting frantically at every step we proceeded up the beach, fifty yards, a hundred yards, two hundred yards—then a cry arose from those present, for seven hundred feet at sea the large

dorsal fin of the shark was cleaving the surface. Back and forth the battle waged, until it became apparent that if the shark did not soon succumb at his end of the line I needs must succumb at mine. After forty-seven minutes of such gruelling work the shark made an unconditional surrender. He was pounced upon by a reception committee of two, each armed with a gaff, and a minute later was lying on the beach, all in. So was I. It was three days before the effects of the terrible strain on all my muscles wore off, so is there any reason why I should agree with any man who holds the shark in contempt?"

The ideal outfit for shark fishing would consist of a reel holding at least sixteen hundred feet of 12 thread line. This reel would be too large for the average fishing but when sharks are in, they usually make their presence known. My system is to hold the shark outfit in reserve, to use at the proper time. I suggest a 12 thread line for it is my belief, founded upon the experience of myself and others, that this size will stand all the strain that any fisherman will be apt to put upon it. No surf fish, with the exception of the shark, will be at all likely to take anywhere near a thousand feet of line, and there will be few, even among the latter fish who will have the stamina to run out a third more than this.

The rod should be rather stiff, and at least thirty ounces, including the butt, as the bait used will be heavy and rather difficult to cast with a limber stick. The hook, a 9-0, should be hung on seven or eight feet of piano wire. Two connecting links of this wire are far better than a single strand. The lengths are connected by a three-way swivel, to which the weight is attached. As a leader of this length is rather difficult to cast, it is advisable to double the wire when the bait is affixed, tying it with a light cord, which breaks at the strike. Any sort of fish will answer as bait, though nothing is quite as good as mossbunker, or menhaden, because of the oily slick which it produces. The bait is usually tied to the hook with thread or twine, otherwise it will with difficulty be kept on at the cast.

Sharks, like all others among the game fish of the ocean, are not always to be found, but there are few places along our coasts where surf fishing is practised that are not visited by them many times throughout the season. The farther south one journeys the more plentiful they become, until when one arrives in tropical waters they may be located most any day throughout the year.

Those of us who honour a fish in proportion to the battle he gives us will be apt to disregard the evil name the shark has brought upon himself, and

will give him all credit for his good qualities, and this, even though his virtues and his attractions, to the casual eye be nil.

I am satisfied that the time will come when the shark will be classed among the great game fish of the ocean, and will be pursued with all the zeal and interest that are displayed in angling for either channel or striped bass. It has not been many years since channel bass were known only as red drum, and were placed far below their striped cousins, both as fighters and as food fishes. This opinion prevailed only through ignorance concerning their true qualities, and now there are few who have been successful in landing both species, but who will place the channel bass upon at least an equal plane with the striper.

It takes a long time to live down an evil name, and the brain of the average angler is a rather immutable organ, but nevertheless the shark is coming into his own.

CHAPTER VI

WITH THE TIDE RUNNERS OF THE INLETS

When I was down beside the sea,
A wooden spade they gave to me
To dig the sandy shore.

My holes were empty like a cup,
In every hole the sea came up
'Till it could come no more.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

THE heat-shimmering days of July and August had passed. Already was wafted on the drifting winds the first sharp tang that heralded the approach of wine-thrilled autumn.

And with it, up from the dreary sand wastes of southern Jersey, came certain of our fishing mates, with nine red warrior channel bass, the smallest a mere thirty-eight-pound trifle; the largest, a fifty-two-pound fish calculated to send the blood racing through the veins of every true surf angler.

Around the club's great crackling log fire were retold the tales of glorious combat; of long, dark nights of anxious waiting; of sun-warmed days

when the bass "came in across th' bar" and took each and every lure proffered them; of battles fought, and lost, and won, along the gray-faced dunes. But not alone did the "channels" hold the honours. Vieing with them had been enormous schools of tide-runners, the like of which none could remember ever having seen; vast shoals of rapacious bluefish, mad with the lust for killing, which had bitten off and carried away all of our comrades' squids and riggings.

Such were the stories which regaled the ears of Billy and I as we lingered longingly before the cheering blaze, loath to leave the enchanted gathering where men leaned forward with straining eagerness, and the queer, stuffed fish of other days stared down from the walls with glassy, unbelieving eyes.

"Come," I said to Billy. "We do not belong here. Our business lies elsewhere."

And even as we stepped out into the star-pierced night came from out the smoky haze the voice of Nels: "And believe me, boys, when the big fellow took hold, I. . . ."

. . . . . .

The pine-whipped breeze of Barnegat felt good to our cheeks. As we bowled across the dancing

waters there came floating up from the galley the smell of bubbling coffee and savoury beans. Good old beans! The mainstay of many a camping trip and cruise! Beans, cornbread, butter, jam, and a pot of steaming Java; what epicure could ask for more?

We busied ourselves with the overhauling of our tackle, greasing and oiling our reels, sharpening our hooks, fashioning new leaders, testing our lines, offering and receiving suggestions learned from past experience.

And permeating everything was the joyous feeling that we were off once more under the blue sky and the free winds of Heaven.

The channel markers nodded us a greeting in the swift tide as we passed; the gulls gracefully waved their wings in salutation, and even the billows parted on either side to give way to the slender prow of the *Nepenthe.* We were back where we belonged.

Standing out across the miles of marsh and water stood the picturesque shaft of Barnegat Light. And toward this we headed. Memories of seasons past, of soft spring days and sharp fall nights, beckoned us to that lonely sand-duned point and its historic inlet.

In a sheltering cove, safe from the shifting winds, we dropped our anchor. Beyond our

fortifying bank of mud eddied and gurgled the tide on its way to the sea. And across the bleak, sand-swept beach came the moan and roar, now faint, now loud, of the ceaseless surf.

The little teeters, twinkling along the wavelet's edge, eyed us with curious beady eyes as we rowed ashore in the dinghy. The boat grated gently on the shallows and we leaped out onto the squashy bank, and made off across the dunes, plodding laboriously along.

Where the inlet joined the sea we deposited our duffle and ranged along the beach in search of likely-looking holes and sloughs for weakfish. The sea-gods hid their faces that afternoon and our efforts proved fruitless. They showed compassion insofar as they sent us two small fluke, enough for a tasty evening meal. But we were accustomed to the adversities of Father Neptune and his children and minded not our lack of success.

The morning gave promises of better things to come. A light west wind ruffled the bay and sea to just the right extent, the tide had just made up and was swinging slowly in, bearing with it great schools of bait. Our hopes mounted, minute by minute, with the sun.

At 6 A. M. we saw a school of bluefish working through the inlet. They were smashing the bait

here and there as swimmers do with the ball in water polo. Ever and anon a big, dark-backed fellow would come clear out, and the small fry would skitter crazily in all directions.

We changed to squids and bided our time until they came within casting distance. Now they showed nearer. Frank tried a cast, but it fell short about fifteen feet.

"There're fish out there that'll go ten pounds easily," he remarked. And we knew he spoke the truth. We could see for ourselves.

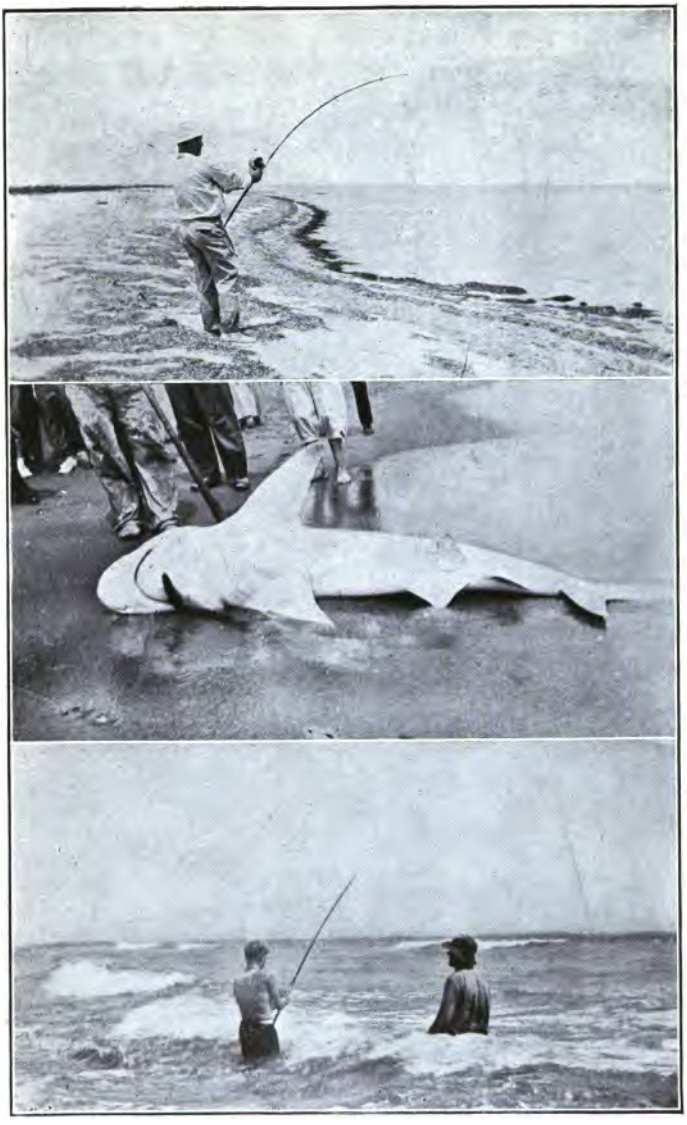
Billy whipped out a two-hundred-footer, and as he commenced retrieving his line, there came a white streak of foam, and it snapped taut.

"First blood!" he sang out, gaily, as he side-stepped down the sand to the tune of his whistling reel and time-keeping rod. "Why the hesitancy, boys? Give me time to land this chile and I'll show you how it's done!"

We heeded not his taunts but sent our squids flashing seaward in glistening arches.

And the blues took hold savagely. Plunging, twisting, jerking, they bitterly contested every yard of the shoreward grind. Like lapis-lazulian Mercuries of the court of Neptune, carved from the very sea itself, they brought home vividly to us the message of the great,mysterious deeps.

We returned to the water all except those for



"There are thrills aplenty in shark fishing."

"As far off as one could see, the gulls were winging to the feast with frantic speed."

our personal needs. For he who kills for the love of slaughter is no sportsman.

Two schools of small weakfish came in during the afternoon but refused every lure we offered them. They were feeding on little mullet and sensed the difference and deception in our squids. We tried to catch some of these mullet. I took the cast-net and waded up to my shoulders in the chilling water, but I could not reach them. At sunset we reluctantly gave it up.

Across the rippling, rosy-tinted inlet the gray-grass-crowned dunes flung themselves protectingly about the red and white shaft of the lighthouse whose solitary eye had now begun to blink at us in a friendly manner over the rushing waters.

What picturesqueness, what romance, what tragedy, the lighthouses of our coasts present to the wanderer! From our rock-ribbed northern shores to the palm-strewn sands of the South they stand, warning the nomads of the sea of the treacherous Scyllas and Charybdises that lie in wait for the unsuspecting. Zane Grey once told me of lighthouse keepers in the Caribbean who went mad from loneliness. Sombrero Light, on the Florida reefs, is another place where this might well occur. I have visited many light-houses, and the warmth and gladness with which the keepers have welcomed me—a stranger from

the outside world—have been pathetic. Only the hardiest of our race can fill positions such as these.

And Barnegat! Barnegat with all her wilderness, her solitude, her legends of pirates and freebooters, her fanciful past when great bearded men with rings in their ears and cutlasses at their belts ran in through her stormy seas to seek shelter among the immortal dunes, safe from the square-rigged cutters of justice and right.

Many the night I have lain in my tent on the north point o' Barnegat, listening to the whistle and moan of the wind across the dreary sand, and to the breakers roaring in fury like great beasts who would kill and destroy. And suddenly, out of the darkness, would come, like the cry of a tortured soul, a long, unearthly scream. It was the Manx cats, remnants of their tailless ancestors who were shipwrecked on the shoals more than three score and ten years ago. Along that desert shore for nearly a century these felines, now as wild and savage as their fiercest jungle relations, have subsisted and bred until their numbers are uncountable. Upon awakening in the mornings we would often find that ham, sausages, or various other articles of camp diet had vanished—carried off to some syrtisian lair.

The bluefish failed to show the next day, nor did they put in an appearance the day after that. A

few scattered bands of weakfish came in, but they were small—not the great roving shoals of which we had dreamed.

So we hoisted anchor and sailed away southward to where the sea had again broken through the bay's sandy barrier and formed New Inlet.

I saw Billy gazing longingly at certain marsh islands as we sped along, and I knew he was thinking of those bleak December days when, enveloped in gunning coat, sweaters, and boots, we would be ensconced on one of those ice-hemmed points, waiting, half frozen, for the sound of fast-beating wings.

Beach Haven added Art and Russ to the party, and as we headed out into the channel for the final run to the inlet night closed in upon us. We were forced to use the search to pick up the stakes, but at last the long white beam of light showed the historic cedars and we ran in back of the point to ride out the night in the little bight.

Russ volunteered to act as cook, so the rest of us drew lots as to dishwashing and drying. This being arranged to the satisfaction of all concerned, we crept to our berths and with blankets piled high to keep off the sharp night winds, rocked off to sleep.

At 3:30 A. M. the jangle of the little alarm drew us protestingly from the web of slumber. With sticky eyelids and hoarse grumblings we snuggled

down into our warm nests, arguing as to who should rise and light the fire. How many of us have gone through the same experience time and time again! Then someone who has more gumption and unselfishness than the others emerges, shivering, and puts the coffee "on t'bile." In our case it was the faithful Billy. How we loved him for that! We could hear him in the bathroom, dousing cold water in his face and br-r-r-r-ing and sputtering with the shock of it. What dogs we felt . . . and how comfortable!

Outside the sun was just peeping over the dunes to the eastward and great flocks of snipe were trading along the beaches, feeding on the seaweed beds. This galvanized Art and I into action, and while breakfast was nearing completion we took the skiff and slipped over to the shore in the cold half light with .20 gauges resting in the stern. How many of you have eaten snipe pie? Those of you who have had that delirious ecstasy will appreciate—those who haven't may imagine—why we lay for more than an hour, scantily clad, behind a crude blind of grass and seaweed, and watched some choice flocks of long-bills decoy to our row of clam-shells set up along the wash.

Breakfast over, we weighted anchor and ran down off the point o' beach where we "dropped the hook" in a protecting cove. Rowing ashore

in the tender we trudged along over the yielding sands to the tide-rip which at that time was forming on the ebb.

The force with which the tide rushes past this rip is inconceivable. I have seen big schooners beating their way in the inlet against the outgoing tide brought to a standstill right off the point, to lie there for ten or fifteen minutes before they could win through the swift current.

A great flock of wheeling, screaming gulls proclaimed to us the fact that a school of fish was somewhere out in that waste of waters, so we lost no time in assembling our tackle.

An idea which had long lay dormant in my mind I had determined to put into practice on this trip, and I had advised the others of the fact before starting. It was to cast for these big weakfish in the same manner and with the same rigging which we employed when angling for black bass.

For lures we had a plentiful supply of three-inch block tin squids fastened to our lines with short lengths of bronze picture wire. I might state, incidentally, that this bronze picture wire is one of the most satisfactory materials for surf-fishing leaders we have ever discovered. And we have tried them all. Gut leaders can be snapped by the first bluefish or dog shark that happens along.

Piano wire and airplane wire is apt to rust and kink, and when one is in a hurry it is hard to rig up. Bronze picture wire, on the other hand, cannot be easily bitten, will not rust or kink, and can be readily bent into any desired shape with the thumb and forefinger.

Billy cast first and placed his squid far out in the tide. He received a strike almost immediately it seemed. The fish rose to the shining bait as a trout might have done for a fly. Clear out of the water it came, and as it was drawn protestingly to shore, we could hardly believe that this leaping, water-cleaving, rainbowed creature was a little two-pound weakfish.

We all waded waist-deep into the rip and sent our baits spinning seaward: We had many strikes, but the fish were all small and were returned to the water as soon as beached. The tide changed about noon and the fish disappeared.

The effect which the tide has on marine life has always been a constant wonder and thrill to me. Near my home a river empties its life flow into the ocean and here, along the jetties, I would often drift for fluke. The best fishing always seemed to be on the flood tide. Upon my arrival, quite frequently, the tide would be dead low, almost ready to turn. Repeated casts resulted in a minus score and I would sit down on the jetty,

feet dangling over the water, and idly wait for the change. Scanning the river floor, I could detect no signs of life. All was dead. No minnows, no crabs—nothing. Then suddenly a miracle was wrought. From a mass of weeds an old "blue-blood" stretched forth a sinister claw, a school of whitebait appeared from nowhere; the sea-grass commenced to sway ever so slightly, and in a trice all was bustle and astir with movement. Out in the river a fish broke water. I would try a cast, and almost immediately the float would dart under to the vicious jerk of a big fluke. The tide had turned.

After a hasty lunch we ran the *Nepenthe* across the inlet to the south beach. At this place, though the conditions for small fish are not so favourable, those for channel bass are excellent. A deep slew-way extends for some distance along the beach, not thirty feet from shore, and here at certain stages of the tide the bass strike in in goodly numbers.

The sun was halfway down the heavens when Russ hooked a large fish. After fifteen minutes of hard fighting it broke away. Art had a bass pick up his bait and run off several yards with it, but did not have an opportunity to hook it. Then a large shark ran away with all of Billy's tackle, and the fun for the day was ended.

The weakfish did not come in the next day, nor the next, nor the next, nor the day after that. But we beguiled the time pleasantly enough loafing around the dunes, and enjoying a much-needed rest. The ceaseless roar of the surf; the lonely beaches; the incessant trading of flock after flock of snipe along the shore; the screaming of the gulls; the wonderful nights that were like days, with a great white moon and a billion stars that turned the sea into paths of shimmering silver, and a thousand other things that the wanderer to south Jersey finds, all made impressions on our memories that will last us through the ages.

Another day found us again fishing in the rip. A southeast wind was piling the sea on the beach in frothy windrows, but withal the croakers and fluke were biting freely. We were using our heavy rods, for we were after channel bass, and did not suppose the weaks would show up in such choppy weather. I soon hooked a bass but lost him far out in the swift current. Then a lone fisherman who had arrived in the dune country the day previous snagged another one—and landed it, a thirty-two-pounder.

Our spirits rose with the tide, and with beating pulses we awaited the next development. It came rather unexpectedly. I saw Art gesticulating wildly and shouting hoarse somethings. For an

instant I could not distinguish what he said, due to the crash of the waves. Then came a lull, and I heard him.

"Look! *Look!*" he screamed, pointing toward the outer edge of the rip. I looked, and saw a great flock of jabbering, fluttering gulls dipping and hovering over the water. Beneath them the surface of the sea appeared to be convulsed by a huge maelstrom. The spray was thrown hither and yon in short, angry smashes. Tails glistened and were gone, white sides gleamed for a second in the sunlight. The ocean was strewn with bits of dead and dying mullet. As far off as one could see the gulls were winging to the scene with frantic speed. *The weaks were in!*

Running crazily up the beach, we jammed our surf rods into their sand spikes, and seized our bass outfits. No time now for delay. Opportunity was at hand and she must find us ready. Billy cast on the run. His squid fell in the undertow, but he hooked a fish and was carried around the point trying to work it out of the swift current and into slack water. I floundered waist-deep into the rip and sent my squid whizzing seaward. It fell square in the middle of the seething, slashing cauldron of fish. I commenced to reel but was stopped by a hard strike. I was fast to a big tide-runner.

The sport developed into a riot. We saw red. As fast as we beached a fish, we unhooked him and flopped him into the undertow. Art caught his squid in his trousers, and with one slash of his knife cut off the entire pants leg. Billy became so excited he forgot to unhook a fish and cast it, still on the squid, back into the sea. We acted like maniacs. We shouted idiotically at each other. And still weakfish came. Now they would be far out in the rip, now right in the break not a yard from our feet. And all the while our little rods nodded and swayed in response to the vicious jerks and tugs of the wearers of the orange fins.

"Fifteen!" from Art.

"Eleven!" shouted Russ, as I unhooked my latest victim and threw him back into the water. By that time I was exhausted. I was panting like a Marathon runner. I was soaked to the skin—but I was happy. So I sat down for a rest and took stock. Here at last was the case

> Where the rails run out in sand rift
> ——where the surf boat brings the rover,
> . . . and the sea-trout's
> jumping crazy for the fly.

There seems to be some confusion among anglers as to the differences between the northern weakfish and the southern sea-trout. Many

believe the weakfish *is* the sea-trout. But as I have caught hundreds of both species, I have had an opportunity to observe the diversity.

The southern sea-trout (*Cynoscium nebulosis*) is a very brilliant creature. It has bright spots on its sides much after the manner of the speckled trout. Its colours are darker, deeper, more distinct than the weakfish. It is a beautiful, flashing, scintillating water-nymph. The many I have taken, trolling with spoons or mullet, have ranged from one to four pounds, and have put up a very plucky resistance.

The northern weakfish (*Cynoscium regalis*), on the other hand, has colours of a more subdued nature. I have seen some weakfish that are almost white. When fresh from the water their backs glow with wonderful blues and golds, but these soon fade. The big tide runners have deep orange fins, the school weakfish, fins of pale yellow. The weakfish is exceedingly gamy but for beauty cannot be compared to its cousin of the lazy southern seas. Ten- and twelve-pound weakfish are frequent occurrences. The largest *C. regalis* I have ever seen, was, as is quite often the case, "one that got away."

It was several years ago. I was offshore with one of the market fishermen. We were jigging. I had gone along, not so much for the fishing, but to enjoy the sunlight and the balmy summer air.

One of the men snagged a large fish. He could hardly bring it to the surface. We all lent a hand and soon had it alongside. It was a giant weakfish. We had no gaff, and in lifting it over the edge of the boat it gave a mighty twist and tore free. I am not exaggerating when I say that this fish would have exceeded twenty-five pounds. It was the largest weakfish I ever beheld.

Those few exciting minutes at the tide rip which had just passed were food for speculation. I had made twenty-three consecutive casts. I had hooked twenty fish, landed eighteen, and three times had received no strike at all. I give this as an example so that the reader may form an idea of how these fish were taking the bait. I have no doubt but that my companions made far better records than did I had they chosen to keep count to the end.

I was brought once more to my feet by the excited ejaculations of Art who had hooked a fish that was fast making off with all the line on his bass reel. It had gained the outer swift water and was heading straight to sea. In vain he snubbed the line with his stall-covered thumb. In vain he attempted to work the fish into the slack water. That weak had intentions of its own. We forgot to cast and stood by, watching with keen interest the line as it hissed through the water.

But Art, like the rest of us, had been raised along the shores of Barnegat and soon demonstrated his mastery with rod and reel. Some fast, expert work on his part turned the fish into calm water, and the fight was won. He hauled it out on the glistening sands, the prize weak of the trip, a big-gilled, heavy-paunched nine pounder.

Out in the rip huge weaks were leaping into the air after the terrified schools of bait which occasionally ran right out on the beach in their fright. As the waves receded we could feel the weakfish knocking against our feet, and many times our squids would be seized as we were in the act of reeling them out on the beach.

It seems at times as if the luck always runs to one person. So with Art. He had a savage strike, and after a spectacular struggle landed a beautiful bluefish.

"Supper on the beach, boys!" called someone, and without further ado we put up our rods and commenced gathering driftwood for the fire. Art magically resurrected a coffee pot and some bread and bacon from his ever-ready duffle-bag, and all was in readiness.

And then he demonstrated some of those wonderful abilities of his in the culinary line which the great out o' doors had, by necessity, taught him. Selecting a couple of boards and some seaweed, he

prepared a dish known to the beach-comber as planked bluefish.

With tingling jaws and protruding eyes we squatted around the glowing coals and eagerly watched this ambrosial food garnished with bacon and served on plates torn from the hull of a near-by wreck.

The flaming sun had long sunk into purple haze beyond the salt marshes to the west as we slowly and regretfully made our way back to the cruiser. The little chunks of sand kicked up by our toes skipped along the beach just ahead of us. Back in the dunes the beacon shot shafts of searching light far out to sea. The sound of the surf grew muffled and faint. The *Nepenthe*, like a ghostly shadow, lay silhouetted against a pale new moon.

Thus ended our quest for the tide runners of the inlets. As I write, the last great school of finny, rainbowed beauties has left for warmer seas.

The other night, before retiring, I stepped out on the porch. Suddenly from out the northwest an ice-blown wind swept my forehead. Far above the dark blue vault came the whistle of wings and the dismal honkings of a passing multitude.

And then I knew that that vast, lonely land of sand and sea was denied to my wandering feet until "the Red Gods made their medicine again."

THE TEMPEST

A wolfish-wild sea pounding upon the beach.
Wave upon wave snarling at the flattening bar,
Pouring its shifting sands into the slough—
Levelling all.

The east wind hissing and slithering across the dunes,
Tearing up quiet stretches of the bay,
Loosening from their moorings countless fleets of kelp and
grass
To flow seaward on the next tide
For a voyage along a strange shore.

The stinging spume obliterating all foot-writing—
Human, four-footed, feathered, shellbacked—
From the prostrate sands.

The inky mantle of a midnight crowded close
By the black clouds, fast flying on the wings of the storm,
Shutting tight the windows of the physical eye.

—And there, in the midst of it, facing the raging breakers,
Alone and indiscernible,
A speck in the wrack, echoing the exultation of the tempest,
A fisherman fast in a slim, racing thirty pounder!

SWITCH REEL.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE OFFSHORE BANKS

A GREAT many of us, more or less, have in our veins the blood of the Vikings and Norsemen, and down through the ages still flows in us that love for adventuring on the unknown, that love for the ever vast and mysterious sea, which once born within one remains forever.

From early childhood I can always remember looking from my bedroom window out upon the sea. What lay beyond that vague gray line which my nurse told me was the horizon? That line upon which the ships used to pass? What was on the other side of it? And why didn't the ships fall over its edge? These were always unfathomed mysteries to me, but in my little heart I determined I would some day solve them. I would go to the horizon and see what lay beyond.

At the age of seven I made the acquaintance of the captain of the Coast Guard Station. I used to sit for hours in rapt adoration at his feet, listening to his tales of the sea and of the strange monsters

that dwelt therein. He taught me of the winds, of the movements of the fish, and how certain signs foretold the coming of storms. He showed me how to read the "glass," how to tell the male from the female gull, and many other things which I absorbed as a plant might absorb moisture. Had I learned my school lessons as well as I did those he taught me I would have led my class I am sure. I have one of my old schoolbooks yet. Its pages are scribbled over with drawings of ships and whales, of monsters of my own imaginings. One page stands clear in my memory. In a large round hand was the inscription:

> A mammell sukkels its yung and follos ships.
> A porepuss dose it.
> Thare 4 A porepuss is a Mammell.

which showed my bent toward logic.

Then one day came the Great Adventure. The captain invited me to go off fishing with him! Oh, the wonderful thrill and joy of it! I was afraid to tell my mother. I feared she might object and spoil it all. I hardly slept that night. I couldn't. The thought that at last I was going to see the horizon, perhaps go down on the other side of it, drove all sleep from me. At four o'clock in the morning I crept stealthily out of the house, leaving a note as to my whereabouts, and ran down to the

beach, my bare feet padding on the road, unmindful of the sharp pebbles.

The captain was waiting for me, and we set out to sea. He had with him his brother, a brawny, sunburnt, blue-eyed fellow, who pulled steadily and unflinchingly at the oars. Those were the days before the gas engine had usurped the two-arm method, but at that time the fish were more plentiful than they are now and one did not have to roam so far a-sea.

About four miles offshore we dropped the anchor and commenced "jigging," a method of fishing whereby a piece of block tin, known as a squid, in one end of which was fastened a heavy hook, was lowered to the bottom and lifted at regular intervals with violent jerks. The bright piece of metal jumping off the bottom attracted the fishes' attention, and upon investigating, they usually had the squid "jigged" into some part of their anatomy. Whereupon they were promptly hauled to the surface.

I was thrilled at the fishing. But I was disappointed at seeing the horizon as far away as ever. I said nothing, however, but busied myself with my two heavy, tarred handlines which ran over either side of the boat. I had jerked one of my squids into a croaker and was having my hands full hauling him to the surface. All lines

were doing well, and in the bottom of the boat, I mean the "bilge," lay an assortment of weakfish and croakers, to say nothing of several other queer varieties.

Whether it was my lack of breakfast or an article of diet I had eaten I shall never know; at any rate, something disagreed with me and I suddenly felt very faint and queer. I yawned to conceal my feelings, for to confess to illness might make the captain think me a weakling. However, there came a time when I could contain myself no longer. I struggled manfully, but the fates were against me, and I succumbed with a groan.

"Never mind, little feller," the genial captain admonished, giving me a hearty slap on the back. "Jest yew stick t' yer fishin' an' fergit about bein' sick, an' purty soon ye won't mind it."

I followed his advice, in fact, have done so ever since, with the result that I have never been troubled with *mal de mer* from that day to this. I *have* been sick, yes; but by "stickin' t' my fishin'," after the first few qualms, I have soon lost all trace of illness.

That was my first experience on the offshore banks. The lessons I learned then, about the ways and tricks of fishes, I have been able to put to good usage many, many times during the succeeding years.

There is a fascination, a charm, in going offshore through the surf that somehow I find hard to describe. Many and devious have been the ways in which I have at times "put out to sea": in canoes, in rowboats, in sailboats, and in liners, but were a choice offered me I would select every time, the humble Seabright dory and the foaming white-capped surf. There is always the element of danger, of personal risk, in going off through the surf that appeals to every red-blooded lover of the outdoors who has ever slept within sound of the ceaseless sea.

One comes down to the crunching sands in the chilling darkness which precede the dawn, and with the help of his companions rolls his sea skiff to the edge of the hissing waves. All is blackness. The figures of the others are naught but dark shadows as they move against the gray sands and ghostly breakers. Now and then a dull red flare, as someone strikes a match to his pipe, illumines the inky night for a brief instant. You are waiting for a "slatch," a short-lived period of time when the waves break with less intensity, and you are able safely to navigate the choppy channel between the bars. Suddenly someone who has been peering intently out across the waters calls quickly, "Let 'er go, boys!"

There is a rush of splashing feet, the skiff is

pointed bow to sea, and with a mighty shove the boat leaves the beach, the last man struggling waist-deep through the surf, and diving head-first over the edge as he gives the final push. For a brief instant there is a frightful suspense. Will Bill get the engine started before a big comber breaks? The dory rolls sickeningly in the under-tow. Then comes a cough, a sputter, from the little motor, which gradually develops into a steady fortissimo, the water churns at the stern, and the skiff leaps forward! But out of the gloom ahead appears a huge wall of water rising swiftly and rushing forward with tremendous impetus. Will she make it? Will she breast the comber? Or will you be overturned and buried beneath the charging foam? There is a horrible moment as the nose of the little craft hits the great wave, rises until she is almost perpendicular, and then falls with a heavy crash *on the other side!* You have won through! The open sea is yours!

One morning along toward the latter part of August, when the moon and stars were still a reality, and the dawn was only a suspicious tint away to the eastward, Billy and I, together with Cap'n Will and his boy, Lew, rolled our sea skiff down the sands at Belmar and launched her on the tranquil bosom of the old Atlantic. The surf was light and we crossed the bar without trouble.

Away we went over the glassy sea, the "chug-chug" of the motor sounding muffled and dull above the breaking surf.

Minute by minute it grew lighter, until only the moon and one pale star were left to struggle manfully against impending daylight.

Then the sun rose, a great red ball of fire, whose rays shot through the enveloping mists and put them to rout. The pink light glistened dully in the dew-laden cockpit of our little craft, and reflected itself on the faces of those about me.

We headed into the southeast, for the Ridge. On the way to the grounds Billy and I rigged up. We were using light tackle, for we were not after tuna this time. The smaller fry were our objective: bonito, albacore, and bluefish.

One by one the other boats (market fishermen all) joined us, coming out of the rising mist like phantoms of bygone seas, each and everyone heading into the southeast.

No one spoke. The captain stood up in the stern, his hands on the tiller. Lew sat by the engine, caring for her when she needed attention, while Billy and I reclined in the bow, our rods projecting on either side.

Abruptly I had a hard strike. So did Billy. We were into a school of bonito and had both hooked our fish. Immediately the other boats

commenced "circling" the school, an action greatly reminding me of the Indians one sees in the Wild West shows as they ride around the stricken plainsman.

Around and around they went, some making the circle one way, some the other, but always on the outskirts of the school, and not through it. This prevents the fish from being frightened and they will often remain at the surface for ten or fifteen minutes. Should a boat go *through* the school, they are apt to sink at once.

In California this has been overcome by "kite-fishing." A three-cornered kite is flown at right angles to the boat and the angler's line attached to the kite by a break string. By use of this method it is possible to place a bait directly in the middle of a school of fish, at the same time remaining several hundred yards away with the launch. The advantage of this can be quickly seen. The fish do not become alarmed by the whirring propeller and frequently remain at the surface for an hour or more. So far as I know, this has not been worked to advantage on our eastern seaboard, due to the fact that the flying fish is the principal diet of the Pacific tuna, and its habit of leaping from the water and skimming over the surface is best emulated by the use of the kite. Flying fish do not occur in northern Atlantic waters in the

manner in which they do at Santa Catalina and elsewhere.

The school of bonito we had encountered seemed hungry. The other boats were literally slaughtering them. To see those fishermen stand in the stern of their skiffs and "horse" the fish in was a revolting sight to the soul of a true disciple of Izaak, but it was exciting to watch for the time. With an oar projecting on either side of the boat, serving as an outrigger, and each of these outriggers supporting a line, and with two lines trolling from the stern, it kept two men busy "pulling fish."

When fish are striking very rapidly, the handliners use barbless hooks, thus saving time in unhooking their quarry. A mere jerk and the blue, mackerel, or whatever it may be, goes flying off the hook into the boat and the squid is back in the water once more. I have seen the Jap boats, out from San Pedro, employ the same tactics. And the way they would butcher the yellowtail and albacore was a disgusting exhibition.

Out of that first shoal Billy and I each drew five bonito. And glad indeed we were to rest, when they ceased biting and sank below the surface. It is no easy task to handle a four- or five-pound bonito on rod and reel with the boat going full tilt. The captain would not stop the boat and

unless he circled, when a fish was hooked, it was impossible to land it.

We continued on our course and soon were able to make out in the distance the fishermen from Seabright, locally known as "Seabrighters," congregated in great numbers on the "Ridge." This "Ridge" derives its name from a bank or ridge of sand lying at some fourteen fathoms about twenty miles offshore. It seems to be a favourite feeding ground for all the deep-water fish, perhaps on account of their ability to see the small bait more plainly against the background of white sand.

"They're into 'em! See the water fly!" ejaculated Cap, and turning around, Billy and I could perceive the fleet of twenty or more boats weaving to and fro, while every few seconds a splash of water would indicate a hooked fish.

On coming up with them we discovered that they were amongst a very large school of bonito and the sport we had in the next half hour more than repaid us for the trip. Out of that school I took the prize bonito of the day, six pounds and a fraction, while Billy secured a twelve-pound albacore.

We were ankle-deep in bonito (the captain and Lew having lost no time with their handlines during the excitement) when the last of the fish stopped biting. So we headed once more to the east in further quest of game.

We had not far to go. A mile or so beyond Billy had a strike that took three hundred feet of line on the first rush. I was reeling in to get out of his way when something seized my bait right back of the propeller. For the next few minutes I had my work cut out for me until I succeeded in turning him.

It was very exciting. Billy and I were constantly forced to change places in order to prevent our lines from fouling, and if at that particular instant the fish made a vigorous rush, it required the skill of an acrobat to prevent oneself from tumbling into the bottom of the boat.

"Jackasses," remarked Cap. "They're really albacore, but that's what I calls 'em; they're such mighty hard pullers."

Cap was about right; those fish were certainly pullers and about the most stubborn fish I ever saw to get to the boat. When we did succeed in getting them in, we put up our rods for the time being and ravenously attacked our lunch, to which, needless to say, we did great justice.

The albacore is in reality the long-finned tuna, hence the fighting blood courses strongly through his veins. He is an extremely gamy fish.

Late in the afternoon of this memorable day we ran across the largest patch of bluefish I believe I have ever seen. From fully a quarter of a mile

distant we could see the splashes made by the big fellows as they jumped into the air, and when we came up to them, it certainly was a most wonderful sight.

The wind had died down, so that the sea lay like some great burnished plate of steel, with hardly a ripple disturbing its surface. The sun blazed from out a soulless heaven with fiery intensity and the hot, cloudless sky reflected in the water a peculiar greenish gray.

The sea on all sides of the boat was swarming with bluefish. Everywhere one looked bluefish were dashing here and there in their mad rushes after the small fish. These were leaping wildly along the surface in vain attempt to elude their pursuers.

Every few moments a big blue would shoot out of water, to fall again with a great splash. The water resembled a maelstrom from the frantic dashes of the fish.

We at once commenced to circle, and so plentiful were the strikes, and so fast and furious the sport, that at the conclusion of twenty minutes I was only too glad to snatch a brief rest from my strenuous labours.

Billy, who was cursing and perspiring at a great rate, kept shouting at me: "Get out, Campen! Get out! There are some wonders in that school!"

"All right, have your way," I grunted, and

tossed my squid overboard. Instantly I had a savage strike. Two hundred feet of line were stripped off the reel before out of the water shot a beautiful blue, violently shaking his head from side to side like some bulldog, in a futile attempt to spit out the squid.

Repeatedly coming out of water, always eluding the boat and tearing away on long rushes time and time again when I imagined him beaten, he put up a beautiful fight.

The strain gradually told and in he came, glaring defiantly up at us. Cap lifted him over the side, gasping but game, and he was flopped unceremoniously into the bilge. He scaled just four ounces shy of nine pounds.

The strike of the day was, however, yet to come, and as the gods so willed it fell to me.

The boat had been turned westward and we were on our way home when Cap, who had been idly trolling a handline behind the boat, gave a violent jerk. The next moment he was doing his best to induce a thirty-seven-pound tuna to quit its pelagic residence and become an object of culinary endeavour. Even with a 78 strand tarred line and the captain's one hundred and forty pounds it was a hard pull, and took considerable extra muscular exertion on the dry end of the line before the tuna was safely aboard.

"Look out for a strike now!" he warned us, and even as he spoke it came. A great, smashing, benumbing strike it was, and I was powerless to check it.

All I could do was to hang on to my rod and watch the line, a blurred streak on my reel, flash through the guides and go melting into the sea.

Five, seven, eight, nine hundred feet came and were gone, and still no let-up. I had ceased to hope for victory and was sitting in a sort of daze, dully wondering how soon the end would come, when there was a terrific lunge on my rod and then . . . slack.

Weak and trembling I reeled in to find my block tin squid *bitten in half!*

One has no conception of what it means to be hooked into a big tuna unless he has undergone the actual experience. It is a never-to-be-forgotten sensation.

Thus ended one of the most pleasant offshore days of which I have any recollection. None of our bluefish weighed less than five pounds. The bonito averaged about three, while the largest albacore, Billy's, hefted an even twenty-five.

It wasn't always that we fished with light tackle. Far out beyond that same horizon I had gazed on with such awe when a child lay waiting fishes whose size and terrible strength have

to this day remained to us a matter of conjecture. The great *Thunnus thynnus*, the Atlantic tuna, roamed the seas, a "blue torpedo" of the ocean, ready to lower the pride of the oldest and most expert angler living.

By the judicious expenditure of a few dollars we had made an arrangement whereby a certain Swedish gentleman who resided at Seabright should call us on the phone upon the first appearance of tuna off the Sandy Hook grounds. In a few hours we would be at Seabright, and the next morning far out at sea.

I returned home one afternoon, to be told by the maid that a "foreign gentleman" had called up and had left a message to the effect that the "horse-packers" had appeared at Seabright. Needless to say I recognized the fact that the "horse mackerel" were with us once more and that the time for action was at hand.

I discovered Billy, deep in the perusal of a ponderous-looking volume on the subject of *The Habits and Physiological Differences Between Cynoscium Regalis and C. Nebulosis.*

"Here, here!" I interrupted, "stop your dreaming! I have some news!"

"Yes?" he interrogated, dazedly, blinking up from the big armchair. "Somebody catch a fish?"

"Exactly!" And thereupon I unfolded to him my plans, hastily formed since the fateful telephone message.

Sunrise the next day found us miles off the Hook, running eastward with the great fleet of Seabrighters. A slight breeze had sprung up and the cool wind fanned our cheeks with a soft caress. In a few hours we struck the grounds and, the usual arrangement having been made, awaited developments.

This "arrangement" needs some explanation. The market fishermen detest the "horse mackerel" as the tuna are known to them. The huge fish break their lines and snap their riggings. The boats all fish for bluefish, by "chumming" for them. This consists in grinding up, in a meat chopper, vast quantities of menhaden or mossbunkers. The menhaden, being a very oily fish of the herring family, when so ground up, forms a large oily patch or "slick" on the water. Here the bluefish congregate, ravenously devouring the chopped-up bits of menhaden, to say nothing of the baited hooks of the marketmen which are offered in conjunction with the chum. As is frequently the case, the tuna also smell this slick and on their appearance, so savage and ferocious are they, the luckless fisherman is soon deprived of all his hooks and lines. It follows naturally that upon

the first sign of tuna the boat moves to another locality and starts a fresh slick.

The arrangement we made was this: As soon as tuna appeared in a slick, the boat in question would raise an oar as a signal to us. For this we would pay that boat five dollars. Upon arrival at the scene, for every fish *hooked*, we would pay ten dollars (whether landed or not), and for every fish *landed*, an additional ten dollars. This assured us that while we were fighting a fish at a distance which might range from one to ten miles from the scene of hooking it, the market boat would continue to throw out chum, so that, upon our return, after losing or landing our game, the tuna might still be there. As menhaden cost several dollars a bushel, and as the fishermen might be employing their time catching bluefish instead of baiting tuna for our benefit, this was a fair collocation to all concerned.

Billy, who had been meticulously scanning the fleet through the glasses, suddenly said, "There goes an oar!" We raised an acknowledging one in return and ran full speed for the distant boat.

"Aye ban tank we have some sport to-day, mebbe," serenely remarked Sam, his blue eyes twinkling. "Dat bane ef you no break your line, eh?" and he laughed uproariously.

"Aw, forget it, you big blond!" admonished

Billy. "Just you let me *see* a horse mackerel, and I'll be content." We were to see quite a number as it proved later.

We found the tuna in the slick, but not in any great numbers. We let back our baits and at once Billy had a strike and hooked his fish. It proved to be a small one of some forty-odd pounds, and inside of an hour we were back at the market boat. As we neared it, we could see one of the men beckoning frantically, and observed large fish of some variety breaking throughout the whole slick.

The *big* tuna were there at last! A sight met our eyes I shall never forget to my dying day! Swimming some distance below the surface, and occasionally rising to gulp down whole mossbunkers which were being tossed to them, were the largest tuna I ever beheld. Their great forked tails, their bronze backs and deep-blue sides, their white bellies as they turned quickly, registered a picture on the photographic plate of my memory which no acid can ever wash away. I saw tuna in that slick *ten feet long!* Deep down I saw big shadows cruising back and forth that were fish weighing well over a thousand pounds.

I was actually *afraid to lower a bait to those fish!* I feared the consequences.

"Come, come, old fellow," I seemed to hear Billy saying. "What are we here for?"

I tightened the brakes on my big reel, adjusted my rod belt, put on a big side of mossbunker, and mechanically lowered it into the innocent-looking water. For a short time nothing occurred. I saw fish pass and repass the bait, apparently without noticing it. Then, as if in a dream, I watched a tuna as large as a horse rise swiftly to the bait, seize it, and with several savage jerks of his head, move slowly off. I let him run unhindered for several hundred feet, then threw on the breaks and struck—struck as I never struck before.

As to just what happened in the next few seconds I have never had a clear impression. My rod described such an arc, I feared it would instantly crack, my reel commenced gathering momentum . . . faster . . . faster—faster until it was actually *screaming* with terrific speed. Such a leverage was exerted on my belt that I cried aloud in agony. There was a frightful, blurred moment when the sea and sky seemed rushing through space at a dreadful rate, a report like a pistol shot, and two thousand feet of line snapped *at the spool!* Trembling and in a cold sweat I fell speechless into the bottom of the boat.

"She damn beeg feesh!" remarked Sam in an awed voice.

We saw at once that we were employing the

wrong tactics. I, of course, was rendered *hors de combat* for the rest of the day. The pressure of the rod on my abdomen had bruised me so that I did not fully recover for more than a week. Incidentally this was one of the main causes attributed to the death of the late W. C. Boschen, the great swordfish angler. He constantly refused to use the rod rest fastened to the seat, and the tremendous pressure exercised on the ordinary rod belt which he wore injured him internally. As it was now Billy's turn, we decided that immediately a fish was hooked, we should run for it full speed, instead of allowing it to tow us as had been attempted previously.

Billy removed his rod rest and nailed it onto one of the seats, having profited by my painful experience. All was now in readiness.

For a moment we believed the school had disappeared, but a shower of mossbunkers offered to the waters brought to light the fact that they were still with us.

Cautiously the bait was lowered. Sam stood by the engine, ready to throw in the clutch the moment Billy gave the signal; the marketmen steadily fed out the bunkers, and I perched myself in the stern, my fingers nervously grasping the tiller.

Then the unexpected happened. A great

splashing in the water some distance away caused us all to turn quickly in that direction. A big fin cut sharply through the water for one brief instant, and was gone.

"Shark!" raged Billy. "Farewell, tuna!"

And even as he spoke, below the bait appeared a great wavering shape whose size and weight eclipsed our wildest nightmares.

"A monster man-eater!" I gasped. "Cut your line, quick!"

"No, by gar!" thundered Sam. "She ban *horse mackerel!*"

"He's on! Start the boat!" shouted Billy, and off we went.

Hard against the rod he threw his weight, and as the skiff got under way I could hear the reel giving off a sort of moaning hum.

"Faster! Faster! Can't hold him!" he wildly babbled, and as Sam pulled the throttle into the last notch we seemed fairly to leap across the waves.

That tuna headed straight out to sea, and for two long hours we sped after it. The fleet melted into the distance until they were but dark specks on the horizon—then disappeared entirely. A lone gull hovered in our wake for several miles, then it, too, left us. We were afloat on a desert of waves and wind.

Four hours dragged by, and Billy was in bad shape. Despite the fact that he was using the harness, his hands were raw and bleeding, his face pale and ghastly, but with a look of determination on it that spoke far more than words.

During all this time we had been steadily following the fish. And slowly but surely it had been taking line. It did not sound after the general manner of tuna, but acted as if with a purpose, with a determination to reach some definite place.

Sam cast an anxious eye at the sun. It was now two o'clock, and we must be thirty or more miles off the beach. He gave me a questioning look, as if to say, "Are you willing to stick?" I nodded in the affirmative, even though I knew it must mean an all-night vigil, with the possible chance of a storm. As a friend of mine once remarked, "The Atlantic is not the Pacific," meaning that while calm seas are the rule in the latter, the former is at all times treacherous, choppy, and mean.

At three o'clock Billy called me over to him. "I'm . . . afraid . . . I've . . . got . . . to quit . . . old . . . boy," he said, pitifully. "This . . . is . . . more . . . than . . . I . . . bargained for."

But Fate saved him that ignominity. The tuna suddenly turned and ran straight for the boat,

and before Billy could recover the long line, the fish was off.

We turned landward, and at length made out the long gray streak on the horizon that was the good old U. S. A. In the afterglow of a lazy summer sunset we ran through the frothy breakers and up on the firm white sand, "sailors home from the sea."

Tuna fishing is still in its infancy on the Atlantic Coast. A few sportsmen's organizations such as the Asbury Park Fishing Club, the Atlantic Tuna Club of Block Island, and the Tuna Club of New Jersey, have done much to stimulate the interest in it which exists. Unfortunately there are no real facilities for anglers. One must go off with the market fishermen and fight one's fish from a seat on the engine box or a most unstable campstool. But every year there are changes. It is to be hoped that each succeeding season will see more and more anglers, with better boats, and more completely equipped outfits, enjoying one of the most red-blooded pastimes this great country of ours has to offer.

GRAY GULL SHOALS

Off to Gray Gull Shoals again after channel bass—
Taste the breath of salt sea air and hear the lone gull's cry;
Watch the sparkling of the sea and see the cloud banks pass
Slowly in the twilight against a sapphire sky.

Camping on the lonely dunes, fishing night and day,
Roaming up the barren beach when fishing hours are slack;
See the breakers flinging up their rainbows formed by spray,
Hear strange voices calling as the waves go rushing back.

See the merry sun gods dance when the dawn flames red,
See the mirror on the beach when the waves roll in,
Feel the awe that stirs you when the storm clouds rush o'erhead,
Feel the wind that drives the sand stinging through your skin.

See the sights of wonderland pass before your eyes,
Breathe the life of all outdoors that purifies men's souls;
See the sights of wonderland 'neath blue or leaden skies,
Off in God's great wilderness—off to Gray Gull Shoals.

PHILIP ARNOLD LA VIE.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHANNEL BASS OF GRAY GULL SHOALS

THAT which is hardest to obtain, those places which are the hardest to reach, are the most desirable in all phases of life. Things which are easily procured are the least sought after.

So it is in the great outdoors. The far places, the hunting and fishing grounds which are "off the beaten track," the places one has to travel long and overcome difficulties to reach are the most appreciated, and, generally, the most productive of fish and game.

Such a place was Gray Gull Shoals. For several years I had cruised in southern Jersey, thinking that I knew every inch of her wonderful fishing grounds, never dreaming that hidden away among the vast sand dunes lay a paradise for the surf fisherman, a veritable "channel bass aquarium," far from the beaten track, with nothing but the plaintive cry of the nesting gulls and the roar of the lonely seas to break the solitude.

The fishing at the inlets had been slack. Occasionally we would catch a weak or a croaker, but

on the whole, conditions had been poor. Where the channel bass were we could not figure out. It was the season for them, but in two weeks' fishing only one had been taken. Had some dearth among the fishes killed off our coppery warriors, were they late in arriving, or had they gone elsewhere? These were questions we asked each other and which none could answer. The sea and her children are so mysterious and everchanging that one can never be sure of anything. I saw the tide run in once for eight hours and turn around and go out for ten, a phenomenal occurrence, but helped materially by the wind and moon.

We decided to go exploring. Far better to be on the move than to sit for hours on the beach with an idle rod. We climbed aboard the *Nepenthe*, settled down for an extended cruise, and hauled up the anchor.

Whither away? That was the question. To the southward, it was finally agreed. That phrase, "To the southward," has always had for me a fascination that I can never shake off. So much always lies to the southward: palm-strewn coasts and tropic skies, misty headlands, dank jungles and sweet-smelling orchids, rich silks and spices—adventure—romance! It is a land of dreams.

In this instance a great land of marshes lay to

the southward, broken by narrow creeks and waterways, and toward these we headed. Picking out at random one that seemed to hold promises of better things beyond, we pointed the nose of the *Nepenthe* toward it and headed up the winding, twisting channel, which at times nearly doubled back upon itself.

The marshes were filled with birds, great, stately blue herons which stalked majestically about, peering into every pool and salt pond in search of shrimp, luscious morsels for their eager beaks. Mud hens jumped from the banks and made off at a great pace, dropping out of sight behind some distant clump of marsh grass, and always the flocks of gulls with their piercing "cree-cree" wheeled, twisted, and fluttered at our approach.

At last we reached a place where it seemed impossible to go farther. The water shoaled up to a scant two feet and, try as we might, we could not force the *Nepenthe* across into the deeper water which we could see beyond. The only thing to do was to wait for the high tide, and if we could not make it then, we knew it would be useless. As high water was some two hours distant we amused ourselves by catching croakers which seemed to be plentiful along the edges of the banks. Two of us took a swim much to the others' disgust. They complained that we frightened the fish. Maybe

we did, but time was our own—there would be other days to fish—and who could refuse such invitingly cool and refreshing water?

"High water, boys. Time to be going," announced Billy. Art and I hastily scrambled aboard and got into our clothes as swiftly as possible. Everyone, except Billy, went forward with poles and oars and we managed with the help of the engine gradually to edge the cruiser across the shallows into the deeper channel.

With a sigh of relief we once more took our places, watched the grasses and the minutes slip by, at peace with ourselves and with the world.

The creek became narrower and narrower until the sides of the *Nepenthe* continually scraped against the banks. Billy looked doubtful and thought we had better not go on. But there was no possibility of turning, and we proceeded at reduced speed. Suddenly we came to a bend. There before us lay a perfect harbour, the only entrance being a tiny inlet which flowed in across endless shoals that seemed to stretch up and down the coast as far as the eye could see. Exclamations of delight escaped the lips of everyone, for in those misty bars stretching away into the distances we knew there were cuts and channels which must hold our old friend, *Sciaenops ocellatus*.

For several miles before we reached the inlet we had been noticing great flocks of gulls, a beautiful soft gray in colour, with black heads, and when we dropped the anchor, they arose in clouds from the surface of the water and the surrounding shores. I have never seen this species of gull in such great numbers at any other point along the coast. It was evidently a nesting ground for them. Back of the dunes we found many old eggs, evidence that at certain seasons of the year there must be a gull rookery there. From a closer study of these beautiful birds, with whom we were thrown in constant contact during our stay there, I came to the conclusion that they were *Larus atricilla*, though I was never able to approach one of them close enough to ascertain definitely.

The tide was ebbing and those miles of shoals gave forth a continuous soft roar that is difficult to describe. I wanted to run down the hard beach in my bare feet, shouting to the wind and sea at the top of my voice, to dance, to plunge into the smashing breaks, and dash madly out across the shallows. I am often affected this way. It is a sort of mania which always comes over me on some great mountain height or along the sand-blown beaches. Some day I am going away all by myself, where no one can see me, then I am going to shout and sing to my heart's content. Were one

to do such a thing in the presence of others he would undoubtedly be considered a fit subject for a lunatic asylum.

We wandered down the sands, discussing plans for the morrow and casting speculative eyes into the cuts and passes for a likely spot for channel bass.

We had stopped to examine a very curious shell, and while we were arguing as to what kind of creature had at one time made it its habitation, I heard the whistle of a golden plover, a private signal long used by Frank and myself. Turning I saw him quite some distance ahead, beckoning frantically. Arriving at the spot where he stood, what a sight met our eyes!

The beach at that point dropped abruptly; not on a gradual slant, but perpendicular, like a garden wall. This wall of sand seemed terraced or ridged down its entire side; in every ridge we could make out the backs and sides of hundreds of big sea clams, which had buried nearly out of sight. Lifting our eyes seaward we beheld, not eighty yards from shore, a long sandbar which ran parallel with the beach for several hundreds yards. Between the bar and the terrace lay a deep pass, narrowing at one end, where the bar extended in toward shore, to a scant ten feet. At the time of our first seeing it, dead low water, there could

have been scarcely more than four feet of water in the deepest part. What it would be at high water we could only conjecture.

Here was a formation that surpassed our wildest dreams. The possibilities from an angling standpoint seemed to promise more than we dared to hope. Thousands of broken shell bits lying on the bottom and along the shore was proof that fish had been working among the clams, crustacean loving fish, big fish!

Filled with excitement and enthusiasm, we made our way back to the skiff, rowed out to the cruiser where everyone immediately commenced hauling out his tackle, selecting his favourite hook or leader, oiling reels, and indulging in the thousand and one delights known to the surf fisherman.

Phil had remained on shore. He is a sort of naturalist in his way, and had wandered off in the dunes in search of ancient eggs left to the mercies of the sun and wind by our beautiful gray neighbours at their annual spring hatching. In the course of an hour he hailed me from the beach and I rowed in to get him. He had six or more beautiful eggs, mottled with daubs of dark brown, real precious gems of the sandy wastes.

I had my ornithological kit with me and together we sat on the stern of the *Nepenthe* and

began to blow the eggs much to the disgust of the others who were in the cabin preparing dinner.

Tomato cans and cracker boxes whizzed past our ears at intervals, together with certain remarks about "gas attacks" and other things too sulphurous to mention.

Frankly, the eggs were not what might be termed "strictly fresh." Two contained the remains of what at one time had been the beginings of some very beautiful terns. However, we made out very well and succeeded in preserving three fine shells.

That night we all slept as if we were drugged. I think perhaps it was the surroundings, so peaceful, so unprofaned by the touch of man. At any rate, I never so much as moved, and I am, falsely, I think, accredited with being a somnambulist!

At dawn we were on the beach. The tide was low, as on the previous evening, but by the time we had reached the pass it had turned and commenced to run in. There seemed to be nothing but croakers biting. Several of these splendid little scrappers were brought struggling through the surf only to be released. The hours passed, and each succeeding wave brought the tide curling and hissing farther up the beach.

Art, Phil, and Billy, feeling the pangs of hunger, deserted Frank and myself to vanish up the sands

in the direction of the cruiser whither, they assured us, we would be only too glad to come, "when lunch was ready."

Shortly after this I sat down on an old box with my rod across my knees, and as a guide of mine once said, "had a spell of thinking." The white sand, the blue sky, the seemingly endless shoals with their low roar of breaking surf made me very drowsy. I dozed, caught myself, dozed again, and was brought back into the land of reality by a sharp tug on my line. It was a croaker, and I could feel his sound box vibrating as I unhooked him and turned to throw him back into the water. As I did so, I heard a sharp whistle from Frank and glancing in his direction, my heart gave a violent leap.

His rod was bent in a beautiful curve, his feet were planted firmly in the sand, and on his face he wore an expression I have seen so often when he was fast to a red warrior of the seething surf.

I hastily rebaited and cast. On the instant, it seemed, that my bait struck the water, the line began running out, first in short runs, then longer ones and finally at a regular but ever-increasing speed. Just as I was about to strike, the bait was dropped and I reeled in to find it badly mumbled and of no further use.

Frank was now over half a mile from me, his

" . . . to cope with the coppery comet's rush."

"The offshore ridges are a realm of promise to the angler"

fish having worked up with the tide. I cast again and the identical same thing happened. Perhaps the fish were not hungry; perhaps they did not like the bait.

I put on an enormous piece of squid, topping it with a head from which the tentacles dangled at least six inches. Again I cast. This time I was in no mood for fooling and struck at the second run I received. There was a swift rush, my rod nearly buckled, and I was hooked to a fighting channel bass.

Ordinarily I take my time. The more fight a bass can give me, the more I enjoy it. In this instance I fought the fish hard for I had seen, for a fleeting instant, along the edge of the bar, a fin I knew belonged to no channel bass.

As it was, it was a half hour before I had the fish near the beach. Even then it was no easy task to beach him, as he lay head to sea and every wave that struck the slender 9-thread line bid fair to part it. Waiting my chance I got the bass coming on the top of a comber, and as it broke, it slid to him to within reach of my eager hand.

As I dragged him up the beach I made out Art on the roof of the cruiser's cabin a mile or so away, wigwagging frantically.

C-O-M-E T-O L-U-N-C-H I spelled out, though it was difficult to see on account of the

salt wrack which lay over the beach like a soft white mist.

L-U-N-C-H B-E D—— T-H-E B-A-S-S A-R-E I-N I signalled back and turned to my captive.

He was a beautiful member of his tribe, shimmering with an almost silver sheen, tinged with a faint coppery hue, which would become more pronounced after death. He had been game to the last, but when drawn upon the sands, had not so much as given a flop of his tail. All his energy had been expended in that one last struggle with an unknown force which had drawn him forth from his native element. He later weighed an even thirty-five pounds.

What effect my message had had upon those on board the boat I could not know. Frank was out of my sight. They must surely have seen him from the *Nepenthe* by now. And true enough, when a short time later I saw the skiff being rowed madly toward the shore, I came to the conclusion that Frank's battle must have been terminated—successfully.

I made another cast; this time lost a rig on a large shark, evidently the one I had observed a short time previous. A new rigging and I was out again, but for a long time without results. Then came a sly pull on the line, followed by a long run. I was fast to my second channel bass.

I passed Billy on my way down the beach, and advised him where to cast and how the fish were acting. About twenty minutes later, when both the bass and I were resting, I observed that he was hooked to a fish and distinctly saw it making a rush across the bar for the open sea, ploughing up a white furrow of foam as it dashed across the shoals.

Soon I passed Phil and Art who were hastening to the scene of battle as quickly as the retarding sand would allow. They stopped for a moment to watch me and said that Frank had beached his fish and had taken it out to the *Nepenthe* for the purpose of weighing it. Also that lunch was getting cold. A savage rush on the part of my friend ended the conversation. I shouted good luck to them as the bass dragged me nearly into the undertow.

Twenty minutes more it took me to beach him, nearly opposite the *Nepenthe*. That was enough for one day for me so I hailed Frank and he came ashore and got me. After a short but invigorating swim we finished the remains of the long-postponed lunch, washed up the dishes, and—went to sleep.

We were awakened by the others who were shouting from the sand for someone to come and get them. I jumped into the skiff and pulled for the bank, but the swift-running tide carried me some distance out before I made the landing, much

to their annoyance. It was extremely irksome, they assured me, to be forced to drag two perfectly good channel bass some distance along the beach when the gentleman in the dory, had he been any kind of an oarsman, could have spared them the hardship by landing where he was supposed to. They were splendid fish, one going nearly forty pounds and when the choicest steaks had been cut from all of them, we had enough fine fish in the ice box to last us for several days to come.

Late that afternoon Art and Phil and myself started out for a good long hike along the beach. We were clad solely in our swimming trunks, for who could tell at what instant an invitingly cool cut or slewway would tempt us into running madly down and plunging into it. The salt water always works wonders with me. There is something in the bracing tang of the great sea as it sweeps in over the shell-ground sands that acts as a wonderful tonic, a strength builder for tired muscles and wearied minds.

We were in at the slightest excuse, shouting and laughing like a bunch of kids, hurling seaweed and clam shells at one another in a manner calculated to shock the least conservative of Anthony Comstocks. And then we were off again, tramping along the beach, digging our toes into the yielding sands, and vibrating red-blooded life in every fibre.

We waded out on one bar for nearly three quarters of a mile, breasting the stinging breakers, splashing through the shallows, filling our basket with the fat, luscious clams which thrived in every sandbank.

We had no thought for the future, nor did we care. Had we known that during the two weeks that lay ahead of us we were to hook into the wonderful total of fifty-one channel bass, each landing and losing his share, I doubt much if we would have felt more joyful or contented.

We trudged on and on until lengthening shadows warned us we must be turning homeward. Retracing our steps we faced a wonderful sunset whose colours flung themselves far out on the dancing waters, mirrored themselves in each tiny sea-filled shell and pool, and threw a purple rosy tint over every dune and headland.

Like men in a dream we reached the cruiser and set about preparing the evening meal. It had been a day filled to the brim with thoughts that never touched on the sordid things of our old world.

That night we crept to our berths against the tide-lapped side of the *Nepenthe* and drifted off into other lands, lulled to unconsciousness by the plaintive cries of the sea birds and the moan of the surf across the miles of Gray Gull Shoals.

CHAPTER IX

THE SMALLER BRETHREN

IN THE main this volume has dealt with the great game fish of the ocean, and yet I have no doubt that the every-day fish which frequent the surf afford far more sport to the average angler than do the bass, the sharks, and the tuna, for while these fish I have named are irregular visitants to our shores—their movements being regulated to a great extent by weather and water conditions—smaller fish of one kind or another are with us throughout the season.

The possibility of capturing an unusually large specimen always has been and always will be a big incentive to the red-blooded angler, and yet four days out of five we are satisfied with taking such worthies as weaks and croakers and flounders, with an odd bluefish or kingfish by way of variety. However, these fish, and many others besides, compare so favourably with the best that inland waters produce that even though the surfman angle from one year's end to the next without

beaching a single rod-straining trophy, yet may he consider his season well spent.

It is my belief that true sportsmanship consists of achieving complete happiness and content in whatever form of *clean* recreation, conditions, or environment may afford, rather than to specialize in some one particular branch of hunting or fishing. Commutability of interest should be developed in sport as well as every-day matters if we are to enjoy it to the fullest.

As I look backward I find that some of my pleasantest recollections are of those days spent with the smaller game fish and game, when my endeavours were blessed by a moderate bag both in its total and in its individual makeup. Days with the weakfish and blues, or with snipe and ducks have afforded me fully as much pleasure, though perhaps lacking somewhat in retrospective gratification, as those times when I have been fortunate enough to capture fish of exceptional size, or when my rifle has put down one or the other of the great game animals of forest or mountain.

Surf fishing has come nearer to satisfying my desires in the realms of sport than any recreation in which it has been my pleasure to engage, and this result is brought about to a great extent by the variety of experiences into which it has led me, and the uncertainty of it. This thing of

casting one's bait, and of having no knowledge as to what manner or size of fish will take it into his head to investigate and perhaps to swallow the offering, tends to keep the angler in a state of eager expectancy. Each slightest touch or nibble brings one up on his toes, for some of our greatest game fish are gentle biters; such as the channel bass, for instance, who usually makes a practice of mouthing the bait ere he gorges it. An experienced surf fisherman, taking into consideration time, place, and bait, can frequently name his fish before the actual fight has begun, but even with the expert there is invariably a moment of doubt.

When the schools of bluefish and weakfish are feeding close inshore on mullet and mossbunker fry one can be reasonably certain as to his quarry even before his cast is made. Some of my happiest moments have been spent with these fellows, and not a few thrilling experiences have resulted for not infrequently I have taken from the schools fish of exceptional size and strength.

A gifted writer has named the black bass as "the gamest fish that swims," and for twenty years the phrase has been repeated by less luminous constellations of the angling fraternity, yet much as I love and admire this dark-hued warrior—and I have fished for him since boyhood in a hundred waters—it is my conviction that old ocean harbours

several finny scrappers who, in proportion to their size, are stronger, faster, and will give a more sustained battle. One of these is the bluefish. (*Pomatomus saltatrix.*)

Though they are taken from the beach as early as June, they are little in evidence until late in the season, September and October being the months of their common visitation. Those captured in the spring and early summer rarely average very large, nor do they gather into the great schools one sees later in the year. I know of few things that will serve to bring the blood of the sportsman to the boil quicker than a sight of one of these schools of blues feeding inshore, their presence frequently attested by flocks of gulls, which swarm to the spot, intent upon the bits of bait which float to the surface. The movements of a bluefish are much like those of a terrier in a rat-pit, excepting that the fish is ten times as fast in his attack, and a hundred times more destructive. He has been appropriately likened to a living chopping-machine, for the action of his sharp teeth and powerful jaws in a school of mullet or menhaden creates tremendous havoc. It has been asserted that a bluefish will destroy five times his weight of bait in one day, which would mean anywhere from twenty to a thousand lesser fishes. As the fishes upon which

he feeds are unfit for human consumption this fact does not tend to lower him in the esteem of the angler, though no doubt the menhaden and mullet have a very different idea concerning him.

Many blues are taken during the season on their natural bait, the hook being fitted, of course, with a wire leader, but when the great schools follow the mullet in from the sea, which usually occurs in the autumn, the metal squid comes into play. Even at this period no bait is more effective than a small mullet, but the artificial lure has the advantage that it saves re-baiting, and can be cast farther and with greater accuracy, and then, too, at this period the fish are usually so voracious that there is no discriminating between natural and artificial bait.

The model known as the Belmar is the most popular squid among surf fishermen. It is mounted with two hooks, and is rather more compressed and flatter than the diamond pattern. The double hooks of the Belmar are an advantage, certainly, and a still more recent model of the Belmar, which is built with a ring to which independent hooks are attached, is finding favour. The weakness of all heavy, artificial lures lies in the ease with which they become disengaged from the fishes' mouth. This holds good, too, even with the plugs so much in use among bass and pickerel

fishermen. To my mind, the mere act of attaching a hook loosely to the lure does not overcome the evil, as it is the weight of the bait rather than its rigidity which causes it to fly from the fish's mouth at a shake of his head. While a metal squid of either the Belmar or Diamond variety is quite effective, I believe that better lures will be developed ultimately. I have had good luck with bluefish when using a Wilson, and other spoon hooks, equipped with a single hook, though the difficulty of handling these lures on the surf outfit will keep them from becoming popular. A small Diamond pattern has brought me success also. In short, it has been my experience that the lighter the bait, the less danger exists of it being thrown by the fighting fish. A small squid also is far less apt to be overrun and for this reason is a better hooker. Several times, when it has been necessary for me to resort to a large lure, I have found myself losing two thirds of my strikes because of the blue hitting far forward of the hook. When this is the case, a second hook wired to the head of the squid will be found efficacious.

There is no doubt in my mind but that a good artificial mullet, which would duplicate the genuine article, and which at the same time would handle well in the water, would prove as good a

strike getter as the artificial minnows have proven for fresh-water fishes. My only experiments along this line have been made with wooden models covered with tinfoil.

In squidding for bluefish, the lure is dropped into the school and is then reeled in rapidly, with the rod held high. The speed with which the bait is recovered should be governed by the condition of the water. In a smooth sea the fish work higher than in rough water, ordinarily. The strike and subsequent battle of a blue are dramatic and soul stirring, and even on a heavy rod, this beautiful fish will test the quality of the tackle as well as the mettle of the angler.

Either on the end of a line, or prone on a platter, with a garnish of lemon and parsley, there is no better fish than this blue-backed warrior, and a man who wends his homeward way at evening with three or four or a half dozen bluefish dangling from a stringer is one to be envied by those less-fortunate and less-sensible brothers who fritter away their time in commercial enterprises when they might be a-fishing.

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The weakfish is far more plentiful than the blue in the sections where they are both found, and his distribution is more general. Throughout the season they are common visitors along our coasts

and in our bays and estuaries and are probably as well known as any of the salt-water game fish. Though lacking the power and-tenacity of the bluefish, they are strong fighters, and on light tackle will give a battle to be remembered. They are a fraternal sort, these fellows, and are frequently taken along with croakers, flounders, and others among the common fish of salt water.

No rule can be laid down regarding their habits or methods of feeding. They are captured with bottom bait, and on the surface; still fishing, and squidding. Early in the season the weakfish are found in small, scattered schools, but along in the autumn they gather in great hordes preparatory to their southward migration. At these times for as far as my eye could reach I have seen their flashing forms cutting the water, sometimes running close inshore in pursuit of the mullet and young menhaden. At this season no bait is relished more than a small mullet. Failing in procuring this tidbit, a shiny strip cut from the belly of a weak will answer. At times, particularly when the fish are feeding on small bait, a block tin squid two and a half or three inches in length brings results. The method of using the artificial bait is the same as that employed in squidding for blues, excepting that it should be reeled in less rapidly and at a somewhat lower level.

Throughout the season still fishing is practised much more extensively in the pursuit of weaks than is squidding. In fact few, even among the more experienced surfmen, appreciate the virtue in a moving lure. Among the bottom baits none is relished more than a portion of shedder crab, or a strip cut from that unique and evil-appearing creature, the squid, or ink fish. Either the entire head, or a strip three or four inches in length, makes an attractive bait.

Among all the denizens of the ocean there are few fish handsomer or more sporty in appearance, or which will give greater delight to the eye of the angler. There is little timidity or reserve about this fellow. When he happens upon your bait, he takes it on the jump, without sign of suspicion and with no preliminary nibbling, and immediately attempts to leave the vicinity: a design which not infrequently succeeds. I have seen them pursue the schools of mullet clear to the sands, and known them even to run in so close that they were themselves thrown upon the beach by the breakers. Many times I have cast into the schools when they were so numerous and so voracious in the pursuit of their prey that a strike resulted from every cast, and have taken the fish until I was forced to desist from sheer fatigue.

One afternoon, when they were running par-

ticularly well, and I had tired somewhat of the sport, a young fellow came up the beach trailing a broken rod. He replied eagerly in the affirmative when I asked him if he wanted a mess of fish, so I returned to my fishing. As I released the weaks from the hook, I tossed them back to him and he placed them upon a stringer. Scarce twenty minutes had elapsed when he called out to me that his needs were satisfied, and he held up to my gaze a string that must have contained fifty pounds of glistening beauties. Then he padded down the beach, dragging the fish behind him, and when I saw him the next day he assured me that the entire catch was perfectly scaled from the action of the sand; a statement the truth of which I cannot vouch for as he, also, was a fisherman.

No set rule can be laid down regarding the feeding time of the weakfish, as this is affected by tide, light, and water condition. Though I have caught them at all hours of both tides, in general, the last of the flood and the beginning of the ebb is the best time to expect them. I have, however, known day after day to pass, when they fed only the last couple of hours of daylight, regardless of the condition of the tide.

None among all the salt-water fishes is more universally sought after than this common weakfish, or squeteague, and his brother, the spotted

weakfish of southern waters. Though like most sea fishes his abundance varies with the seasons, he is usually a common visitor to our coasts from early June until November. Were his distribution less general, and were he a bit more backward in regard to taking the bait, I am confident that this fish would rank with the best of them in the estimation of fishermen. At that, he is well thought of and eagerly pursued, for his ability as a rough-and-ready fighter, his elegance of form and colouring, and for his worth as a table fish.

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No fish is better known to the surf fisherman than the croaker, and because of his abundance and general excellent qualities he will always be popular. In appearance he is not unlike the channel bass—he is, in fact, closely related to the great drums—though rarely exceeding two and a half pounds in weight. At times, particularly in the bays and inlets, he schools with the weakfish, and is of somewhat similar habits, though perhaps more of a night feeder. His method of approaching the bait and the subsequent battle he wages are, however, distinct and original. Immediately upon feeling the prick of the hook he points his nose seaward, and persists in making a succession of short, vicious lunges. Being a strong and robust

"The shifting tides of Gray Gull Shoals."

"They were splendid fish, one of them nearly forty pounds."

specimen, and with the structure and the willingness to enable him to put up a strong fight, were he only to combine all those ineffective bucks and lunges into one or two sustained runs there are few fish of his size that could equal him as a sporting proposition.

Fresh squid, shedder crabs, clams, and shrimp are among the best baits for the croaker. When one is fishing over clam beds, the shell fish will be the natural, and of course the most successful, bait to use.

Though they are captured throughout the season in considerable numbers, these fish are most numerous in the fall. During September and October I have seen the surfman capture enough croakers in the course of a night or two to last his family through the winter. They are easily prepared for salting, and being a firm-fleshed fish they are a good keeper.

Notwithstanding the fact that the croaker is a free and ready biter, because of the construction of the mouth, a hook not larger than a 3-o is preferable. Yet I have not infrequently taken them on hooks as large as 8-o, when fishing for bass.

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The kingfish (*menticirrnus saxatilis*) is one of the most eagerly sought after, but in the estimation of a

good many surfmen, a very much overrated fish. How, in the name of high heaven, low heaven, and intermediate points in the firmament, this small, dainty, suppliant creature ever succeeded in gaining the high-sounding name it bears, and why such lusty fellows as the weakfish and croaker have had bestowed upon them such trifling pseudonyms, I have never found any one who could explain. It is true that the weakfish has a tender mouth, but the same thing holds good with many less-favoured fishes. The croaker makes a grating sound when first taken from the water, but he has other individualities which are just as apparent and far more euphoniously described than by the word croak.

Regarding the kingfish, myself nor any other fisherman has ever discovered anything regal either in its appearance or its actions. This fish greatly resembles the fresh-water sucker or red horse in shape, size, and generally vacillating character, with the same gently receding forehead, the same slender lines, and with almost a sucker mouth. It approaches the bait in a demure and tentative manner, and if one succeeds in hooking this fish, the struggle which ensues is adequately described by the word futile. An excellent fish on the table, this I grant you, but no better to my way of thinking than a dozen others with half the reputation.

Unless it so happens that other and better fish are not in evidence I rarely go after the kingfish with special tackle, which means a tiny hook, and bait to match. However, there are times when a mess of pan fish are more to be desired than the possible chance of hooking into a truly worthy specimen, and so I will suggest a bait of blood worms or shedder crab, if they can be procured, though most of the common surf baits are acceptable to this dilettante of fishdom. They should be given plenty of time to investigate and nuzzle the bait, and when the hook is set, it is advisable to reel in one's line whether or not any particular movement is felt, for frequently it is impossible to determine to a certainty if the quarry is hooked, until it is drawn to the beach. No name would fit this so-called king better than that of ladyfish, which, by the way, is borne by one of the strongest and most active and one of the most difficult fish to land in southern waters, another of those incongruities which are so common in the naming of fish and game.

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Two members of the flounder family are familiar to surf fishermen under the names of winter flounder, and fluke or plaice. Each of these may with entire propriety be called flounders, yet among surf

fishermen those fish with their eyes placed upon the left side of the body are generally termed either fluke or plaice, according to locality. The latter fish (*Paralichthys dentatus*) visits us in great numbers during the summer months, while the flounder, so called, is mainly a fish of spring and winter. While they can neither one be considered as a game fish of a very high order, their virtues in the pan make them a welcome addition to the catch of the most fastidious angler. Few articles in the line of sea food are more acceptable to a hungry man than a golden-brown fillet of fluke, or, as they are named on the menu—"fillet de sole." The flesh is sweet and firm, and easily prepared for cooking, when one has solved the weird anatomical construction of the critter, though at first glance it might seem a serious problem. The fat steaks cut from this fellow have less of the true fish flavour than is found in most of the salt-water varieties, and for this reason many a connoisseur esteems him above all other fishes.

In the surf they are in the habit of visiting the flats at high water and lurking in the holes at ebb tide, though a long cast is never necessary or even advisable, for these peculiar, flat creatures venture more closely inshore in their feeding than any others among the quarry of the surfman. Frequently they are taken in the undertow on

fifty feet of line or less, and not infrequently the beginner will achieve greater success than comes to his more expert brother, who by force of habit sends his bait beyond the natural range of the fish. Notwithstanding their unusual and apparently impractical method of locomotion, the flounder develops considerable speed in the water, and though a bottom feeder, for the most part, they will pursue a moving bait with a tenacity and a single mindedness of purpose not excelled by any other fish. When once hooked, unless it happens to be a specimen of exceptional size, they come easily to the beach.

They are willing biters, and will attack a bait half their own size with all the gusto and abandon of a sixty-pound newsboy at a charity banquet, yet because of the shape of their jaws neither an extremely large bait nor a hook above a 6-o in size is advisable. Fresh or pickled squid, or any sort of oily fish bait, will attract them, and I have not infrequently taken them on clams and blood worms when fishing for striped bass.

Like most of the fish mentioned in this chapter, fluke are captured along with a mixed catch, on regular tackle, and with the bait which happens to be most easily procured at the time, or with that bait in which the individual fisherman places his greatest confidence. And here one will

find a great diversity of opinion. Personally, were I forced to choose a single variety of bait for the season through, it would be squid; fresh, if possible, but if this were not to be procured, the pickled article. For such worthies as channel bass, weakfish, and croakers, there is nothing in the food line that will offer greater attraction, as a general rule, though there are times when mossbunker will achieve better results. If it is possible to determine the bait upon which the fish are feeding at the time, it is advisable to use the natural bait, of course, but unless one is able to open and examine a specimen this is usually a matter of guesswork.

Blood worms are unquestionably a good, all-round bait for many of the lesser fish such as kingfish, fluke, etc., and early in the season there is no better bite getter for the lordly striper. Yet few really large bass are taken on worms, or, in fact, with any other small bait. I am a strong believer in using a generous bait, and, if possible, one that is bright and attractive in appearance, for the great game fish of the surf are drawn to the bait by its appearance almost as much as by the slick or odour it gives forth. Shedder crabs, or even hard crabs, carefully peeled, are excellent, of course, and are perhaps the best all-round bait for small fish, but an important objection to this bait

is the difficulty of procuring it and the impossibility of preserving it for any length of time. For a great many years shedder crab and blood worms were the standards of the surfman, and it is only comparatively recently that the fish baits have come into general use.

Squid may be purchased in the market, or picked up at any pound fishery. They are easily skinned and cleaned and packed into jars with a liberal covering of salt to each layer. When prepared in this manner this bait will keep indefinitely, becoming tougher and more odoriferous with each day that passes. The jar or can in which the bait is packed must be tightly sealed to prevent the development of maggots. Incidentally, these white, leathery strips make a wonderfully killing bait for bass and pickerel when attached to a spoon or spinner.

In all cases the squid should be cleaned as soon as purchased, for no article in the fish or flesh line spoils more quickly. However, if it is to be used within twenty-four hours salting is unnecessary, and is in fact slightly detrimental, particularly when the bait is used for night fishing, as the unsalted squid has strongly phosphorescent qualities.

When fishing waters which are frequented by channel bass, bluefish, and sharks, I pin my faith

entirely to two baits, squid and mossbunker. For the two last-named fish the latter bait will prove exceptionally attractive, and among many fishermen it is considered the one best bet. I remember one June day when I had fished the morning through with small reward for my efforts, excepting for an odd fluke or two. The wind was right, and conditions seemed ideal, and I had great hopes of hooking into a channel bass, yet my bait of fresh squid had yielded nothing of real importance. Upon the hot sands there lay the ancient and shrivelled carcass of several mossbunkers, left there by some fisherman days before, and from the belly of one of these half-putrid specimens I cut a generous portion and tied it to my hook with a bit of twine which I always carry in my pocket. With a careful cast—for any snap of the rod would have sent the jelly-like bait flying to the four points of the compass—I dropped it into the second line of breakers. Scarce was there time to reverse the throw off when I felt a pick up and the line moved outward gently for a dozen feet or more, then stopped. My heart was jumping, for this was unquestionably the strike of a channel bass. For a few seconds the line remained stationary, then there came a tug, to which I responded in like manner. The result was a tremendous rush seaward, which was halted only

after some five hundred feet of line had shot from the reel. After forty minutes of active work, at both ends of the line I beached a beautiful bass, who gleamed like silver as he came through the breakers. Within a half hour I hooked another bass on a similar bait, which I lost after a good fight. My two companions who pinned their faith to squid, and whose casts lay close to my own, got nary a pick up during this period.

On other occasions I have failed with bunker and made good with squid and other bait, and this is the way it goes, not only in surf fishing but in other classes of angling as well. One night I fished for hours with small eels and with blood worms, considered two of the best baits for striped bass, and then in the space of an hour I took two fish on sea clams, which I had picked up on the beach. These and many other experiences have proven to me the wisdom of experimenting, not only in baiting but in many other matters pertaining to the fine art of angling in the surf.

The fish which I have mentioned so far in this chapter are among the most important of those which commonly feed in the surf. There are many others which will interest or vex the fisherman who casts a bait into the breakers, and many others which will bring a thrill to his heart and

which with advantage may be added to his larder. There is, for instance that ubiquitous nuisance, the skate, or—as he is unlovingly termed by the surfman—the barn door. Here is one who, like the dogfish, or sand shark, is always in evidence when better fish are off their feed. Every surf fisherman has caught them by the hundreds, and never yet did aught but malediction greet their appearance. They gorge your bait in a sly, ingratiating manner, no matter what its nature, then spread their wings and stop you dead when you attempt to reel 'em in. And the chances are, when you have them on the beach, you find your pet hook buried in the innermost recesses of their interior organs. There is only one way to escape their attention, and this is to jerk the bait away as soon as the bite is felt, for their method of taking the hook is distinctive. Yet, even the most experienced angler is often caught napping. So far as I am concerned, I have no interest in them, for their appearance is too entirely obnoxious for me to care to associate with them in any way whatsoever. Yet I am advised that skate wings are frequently served in restaurants and in the can disguised as crab meat, and it is generally understood that these same wings, when cut into disks and fried in deep fat, are often printed scallops on the menu. In its natural state the

flesh is watery and insipid. To be eaten at all it must be disguised.

Another common fish, and one which is generally considered almost as great a nuisance as the barn door, is the dog shark. Excepting for his more slender build, this is almost a true miniature model of his great cousin, the so called man-eater. As a straight sporting proposition he is not many degrees removed from the skate, and yet, when other fish are scarce he may be eaten, and is not half bad when properly prepared. As a matter of fact, dog fish are shipped to the cities by the thousand and there sold as grayfish. I have even been told by city dwellers that they were relished in preferance to fluke or weakfish. To me the flesh is a bit dry and tasteless. Which statement puts me upon a plane with the old western campaigner who was offered a slice of fried rattlesnake at one of those sportsman's banquets where experiments in outdoor dietetics are in vogue.

"Eat diamond-backed rattler!" he ejaculated, raising his hands in disgust. "Not on a bet. It's too sweet and sickenish for me. But give me a nice piece of fried rock adder and I'll stay with you till the cows come home."

There are two fish which at certain seasons are captured in great numbers, and which are usually left lying on the beach. These are the puffer, or

blowfish as it is commonly called, and the sea robin. Even our own painstaking food commission fails to mention either of these finny creatures, yet they are both good food fishes, and far more palatable than either the skate or dog shark, both of which this same commission has attempted to introduce to a skeptical public.

The blowfish is a fat, wedge-shaped little fellow, of most peculiar attributes. He comes to the beach apparently scared out of his four senses, with staring eyes and gasping jaws. Tickle him a bit on the stomach and he will distend himself to an unbelievable degree, to such an extent, in fact, that he takes on the appearance of a rugby football. He has a rough, metallic skin, which is easily removed, however, and the result is a solid piece of meat devoid of bone. When this is cooked in much the same manner as that employed in the preparation of frogs' legs the result is an article not unlike this delicacy in flavour and in appearance.

Another weird creature which is taken at odd times by the surf fisherman is the billfish. He seldom exceeds eighteen inches in length, and is far less appetizing in appearance than even the puffer or sea robin, for his colour is a vivid, transparent green, which is produced by the colouring of the tiny algæ upon which he feeds. By most people they are considered poisonous, a belief

which is entirely erroneous for they are a most excellent pan-fish. These billfish are never captured in any great numbers and in fact are rarely taken in northern waters, but in a mixed catch they are not to be ignored.

Earliest to appear in the spring, and the last to leave in early winter the frostfish or hake, and the ling, as they are commonly called, offer some excuse for wetting a line when better fish have sought more congenial environments in warmer waters. Both fish belong to the cod family and offer fair sport on the rod. The ling usually appears late in October and the frostfish about a month later. During extremely cold weather they are little in evidence though there is no sound proof that they leave the coast entirely during the winter. Along in February or March they are apt to be taken again in considerable numbers, beating the kingfish by about two months. The run will continue for several weeks, then gradually diminish as warm weather approaches. During frosty nights in early winter thousands of the silvery frostfish are washed up on the beach, where they are eagerly pounced upon by small boys, and even by fathers of families, to be salted down for winter use. Preserved in brine they are not half bad, and I have found them excellent eating when salted and smoked for ten or twelve hours. They

are a bit watery when eaten fresh, and like all fish of this nature they are improved by a sprinkling of salt which is allowed to stand overnight.

The ling is less pleasing in appearance than his running mate, and is flabbier in flesh and texture. They are both free biters and are not at all particular in their choice of food. Squid, spearing, crab, are all good baits, and I have found them striking eagerly on small strips cut from the bellies of their own cousins.

The tomcod is quite similar to the ling in his general makeup, though he never exceeds a foot in length. What he lacks in size, however, he makes up for in his superiority as a food fish. This little fellow arrives about the same time as the ling, though his visitations are far more irregular, and his stay much shorter. They may be taken on a small hook and bait in great numbers, and are esteemed by many as a great delicacy.

While the last of the flood and the first quarter of the ebb tides are clean-up periods for the surf fisherman ordinarily, the ling, the tomcod, and the whiting are night feeders; the best time to go after them being from about five in the afternoon until midnight. A calm evening with an offshore breeze usually spells success during the seasons I have mentioned.

Many other varieties of fish besides those I have

dwelt upon are taken in the surf; little fellows such as the spot or goody up to huge sharks of a half-dozen species, and at times even such deep-water prizes as bonito, but the fish I have named are the most common, and the ones which are most frequently taken throughout the season.

Most of our salt-water fish bite just as freely during the night as in the daytime, and many of them are strictly night-feeders. This gives the office-worker and the man who is employed eight hours of the day an opportunity to gratify his Waltonian passion. Though I enjoy better the hours of daylight, yet I have spent many a pleasant night with rod and reel, when the moon shone high in the heavens and the cool water licked against my boot legs. There is a wonderful sense of mystery about the surf at night, and it has an appeal which is more subjective than objective; the unceasing heave of the ocean, the curling breakers, silver capped and with a froth of foam in their jaws, the unceasing roar of them, and the hiss of receding surf; the campfires twinkling on the beach. On a warm evening in July or August the thought of surf fishing is particularly alluring.

A greater degree of expertness in the handling of rod and reel is required in this night fishing, for one must control the cast entirely by the feel of it. With the amateur, indulgence in this branch of the

sport will result in many backlashes and the loss of a considerable quantity of tackle, until he gets the hang of it. It is well at first to limit oneself to moderate casts. As a matter of fact, a long throw is not necessary at this time, for most fish are inclined to venture closer to the beach during the hours of night and on dull days than when the sun is shining.

Even during July the nights frequently grow chilly on the beach and a sweater or other warm garment is usually appreciated. The thermometer may register a difference of fifteen or twenty degrees a half mile back from the ocean, even on a southerly breeze.

There is a belief extant not only among surfmen but among fresh-water anglers as well to the effect that a west or a southwesterly wind is a guarantee of success, while a breeze from the north or east invariably spells ruin to their hopes. My experience has been that the points of the compass have less to do with it than does the position of the shore in relation to the wind. An offshore breeze is usually to be desired as all fish have the habit of feeding against the wind or the trend of wave or current, and they are of course loath to venture close inshore when the waves are rolling high. There are frequently times when a steady land-breeze, followed by an onshore or a

quartering wind, will bring a great run of fish. I know of at least two points on the Jersey coast which I am in the habit of fishing regularly during the summer, and where I have never failed to make good catches during an east or a north-easterly breeze, excepting at those times when it has been too rough for my bait to hold.

No rule can be laid down as to the places in which fish congregate, though ordinarily it is best to devote one's attention to the holes during low water, and to the flats and bars when the tide is high. Usually, too, the lower portions of the holes, or rather those points opposite to the trend of the current, produce the best results. Because it is always impossible to determine at just what point or at what depth the fish are feeding, it is a common practice to test the various depths by making a long cast and allowing the bait to rest for a few minutes; then if no touch results to draw the bait shoreward eight or ten feet, and again allow it to remain stationary. This is continued until the particular level at which the fish are working is reached.

Blues rarely venture into the shallows excepting at flood tide, and a vigorous cast is required. At times I have seen them remain just out of casting distance for hours at a time, and when at last they did come within the breakers their stay lasted not

more than an hour. Weakfish are vacillating. Sometimes they refuse to come within two hundred feet of shore, and at other times they may be taken with a fifty-foot cast. Croakers are a venturesome fish particularly at night, and flounders feed in the undertow.

Channel bass and drum prefer the holes though I have seen them hooked on seventy-five feet of line. Kingfish are usually found at intermediate points.

I believe there is a tendency among many anglers to strike too quickly, instead of waiting to feel the weight of the biter. As a rule, a fish will hook himself if given a fair chance, supposing also that the hook is not too large. All that is necessary then is a backward sweep of the rod to set the hook firmly. Of course certain vigorous biters such as the bluefish, the weakfish, and the striped bass require an instantaneous response, or the hook is apt to be dropped before the barb is fairly set.

Several years back four of us happened to be fishing the Inlet one day during a particularly good run of mixed fish. One of my companions was a fisherman of great experience, and a tremendous caster; another a capable, all-round surf fisherman, but one who got no great distance into his cast; the third a tyro whose lack of ability was offset to

a degree by an enthusiasm which caused him to keep his bait in the water from morning until night. At the end of the day we found that the expert had captured four bluefish, nine weakfish, seven croakers, and two flounders. The second fisherman showed five weakfish, six croakers, three kingfish, and five flounders. The enthusiast was more than content with a catch consisting of eleven flounders, four croakers, a kingfish, and a fourteen-pound striped bass, which picked his bait out of the undertow at dead high water. I mention this particular excursion because to me it is suggestive of about the average depth or distance at which each fish I have mentioned is found, with the possible exception of the bass, which is always an unknown quantity. The luck of the tyro in taking the best fish of the day in this case is not infrequently repeated, for after all the best rule in fishing is to "keep your bait in the water." This season I fished for two days with a moving picture outfit, intent on filming the capture of a channel bass. At this very point at which we camped I had been fortunate in taking a record bass not three weeks earlier in the season, and Van and Billy were both as expert surfmen as can be found on the coast. Yet the only bass of the trip came to the rod of the fourth fisherman of the party, who had never caught a specimen above

four pounds in weight. I will not deny that its lucky captor deserved his success for he had fished hard and steadily throughout our stay on the beach. These experiences suggest a reason why surf fishing is and always will be the most alluring and fascinating of all forms of angling.

CHAPTER X

BY WESTERN SEAS

DURING many trips to the Pacific Coast I had gazed longingly at the miles of wonderful surf rolling majestically in upon the snow-white sands, and, in gazing, had often pondered on the possibilities offered to the surf angler. In places, it was true, the great Western mountains rose sheer from out the sea, their nether parts laved by the ceaseless waves, their faces turned toward the setting sun, looking forever out across the endless waters to China and Japan. But in other places there were stretches of gray sanddunes, of lonely beaches, where the impetuous breakers flung themselves up the shore and the sand fled shrieking back into the undertow.

"Here," I said to myself, "one should find good angling. I will try it sometime."

But I never did. It seemed, somehow, as if the opportunity at no time presented itself. I was always going some place or returning from it, and other matters constantly claimed my attention. I would be at Monterey, fishing for salmon, and

I would say to myself, "When I finish here, I shall go surf fishing—for the grounds are only a step." But then some friend would wire me from Catalina that the marlin had made their appearance, and that I'd better come down. Then with the marlin and tuna but memories, autumn would find me up at Big Bear or the Suisun Marshes, shooting ducks, while down the coast the fall run of fish was swarming in the snowy breakers.

And so it went. Fate seemed to have decreed that it should not be.

Another strange thing was that I could get no information on the subject. "Surf fishing?" The term seemed unknown. "You mean the surf fish, the ones they catch from the piers and rowboats." No, I didn't mean those little fellows more about which I will write later—but the term "surf" was food for speculation. A few anglers with whom I conversed were of the impression that one might take fish from the beach, but it was all so vague.

In a sporting goods store in Los Angeles I ran across an angler who showed me a photograph of some enthusiastic fishermen with a catch of twenty or more what he termed "oilers," caught in San Diego Bay. They appeared to me to be a variety of sand or ground shark running between fifty and seventy-five pounds. This was interest-

ing. It was not the surf, but still it was very close to it.

And then I spent a few delightful weeks at Coronado—minus my tackle, for once. The miles of beautiful surf fascinated me. And I swore by all the gods of the marvellous West that I would go surf fishing. I did not know just where I was to do this fishing but I was determined I should do it nevertheless.

Then came a telegram. And I boarded the Overland Limited and travelled the five monotonous days back East. I never knew, when, where or how, I should go about surf fishing on the Pacific, should I ever again get the opportunity.

It remained for Mr. A. H. McCloud, of Stockton, Cal., to give me the information for which I had been seeking. I discovered him to be an expert surf angler and one of the pioneers of the sport on the Pacific Coast. Like many others he had gazed for long at the mighty waters that pawed at his doorstep and at last, unable to resist, had seized his sword and had wrenched from the snarling surf many days of glorious sport. From stories he has told me, and from his notes and photographs, I have collected the data which appears in the following pages.

Between eighteen and twenty miles to the north of the city of Monterey the Salinas River

empties its waters into Monterey Bay. Monterey Bay hardly needs an introduction. We have all seen it in our geographies; that half-moon shaped bite in the California coast a thumb-nail length below San Francisco. The tourist to the Golden State knows it best perhaps from Del Monte, a languorous loafing place near the southern tip of the bay. There among the wondrous sanddunes of Carmel artists and photographers have produced canvases and plates that have delighted the eyes of thousands.

To continue—a few miles beyond the point where the Salinas River blends its flow with these sapphire waters is Elkhorn Slough. At both these places the tide ebbs and flows with much force, creating miniature tide rips. Here is a favourite haunt for striped bass, though the method in vogue for taking *Roccus lineatus* seemed to be by trolling from a skiff with spoons, or still-fishing on the bottom with sardine bait. Here, in August, Mr. McCloud and his father betook themselves to try their luck at the surf-casting game. Doubtful, yet hopeful, they were determined they should not depart before they had thoroughly investigated every foot of those waters.

The success which they attained, the reverses with which they met, the lessons they were taught,

can best be described by quoting from notes made by Mr. McCloud at the time. I have endeavoured to follow these as closely as possible, but at times have mentioned little things observed by myself on various trips up and down the coast.

. . . . . .

August 19th.

"Dark, foggy day. Fished Elkhorn Slough steadily from seven in the morning until long after dark. Tried them with several different kinds of bait, but with no success. A few strikes from fish of some kind. Do not know what they were, but am sure, however, they were not bass. About three in the afternoon had a very peculiar experience. Felt something brush past my line. I know it was a large fish of some variety; I could almost feel it hit the line with its tail. About a half hour later Father reported the same thing as having happened to him. Perhaps it was a shark. I do not know."

August 20th.

"Fished Elkhorn up until noon but did not have a touch from anything. This rather discouraged us so we decided to try the mouth of the Salinas River. Immediately our luck changed. The

bass began striking in good shape. Took two before one o'clock.

"Cooked some lunch on the beach. Had a nice striper broiled over the coals, with some fried potatoes and bread and jam. I don't care if I never see the smoke of a city again. I could stay out here forever.

"Started in right after lunch again. The conditions were ideal. Just a slight ripple on the sea and in the mouth of the river and the bass acted as if they hadn't had any food for a month. We received about three strikes to every fish landed. They all averaged around fourteen pounds.

"About three o'clock I saw that Mr. Stienon, a friend of ours, was fighting a big fish. He had been fishing up the river about a quarter of a mile or more from its mouth, with little or no success up to this time.

"I ran to where he was, and found upon my arrival that he was certainly having his hands full. The fish was a big one—this he vehemently assured me. I had no difficulty in discovering that fact for myself. Far out across the rippling water I could barely discern where the line cut through the waves. Ever and anon he would be literally pulled to the river's edge by the fury of a wild rush. It was a beautiful fight and I stood by, fascinated.

"After a great deal of hard work and adroit manœuvring, he turned the tide of battle. The fish had weakened and from then on it was no difficult task to bring him to shore. He came in rather protestingly, I thought, and I could see the great black stripes on his side, even when he was quite a distance away. It was a thrilling sight.

"Mr. Stienon flopped him upon the bank without ceremony though he made quite a rumpus after he got there, wrestling around on the ground so that it was extremely difficult to extract the hook. He certainly was a beauty. We weighed him and found him to be forty-one pounds, forty-eight inches in length and twenty-eight inches in girth. These are the kind of fish that make life worth while!

"Fished the balance of the afternoon but the fish seemed to have disappeared. A cold, damp fog came up and made things rather unpleasant. About eight o'clock we stopped fishing. Took five altogether to-day, totalling in all seventy-four and three quarter pounds, the largest a pretty eighteen pounder. This did not include Mr. Stienon's big fellow."

August 21st.

"This morning my father and I went down the beach to within about two miles of Monterey.

Found a beautiful looking formation: clear, deep water, a long sandy stretch with picturesque grass-crowned dunes flung along the entire background, like some great bulwark, warning the sea to keep its distance.

"No sooner did I see this place than I had a feeling we were in for some wonderful fishing. You all know what that means. There are certain places that impress you instantly, you don't know just why, but they do—and there are other times and places when you wouldn't give thirty cents for your chances. Some people call these feelings "hunches." Call them what you will, I have found nearly always that I can depend upon mine.

"Began fishing at 8 A. M. Tide on the ebb. High fog and sharp west wind. We were greatly troubled by the crabs and surf fish. These little fishes, greatly resembling the white perch, are very abundant. A short description of them might prove interesting due to the fact that they are among the most frequently caught fishes along the entire California coast.

"The family of surf fishes is a large one, containing, according to Jordan and Evermann, '17 known genera with about 20 species, 2 of which occur only in Japan.

"'All these species are viviparous. The young

are hatched within the body where they remain closely packed in a sac-like enlargement of the oviduct analogous to the uterus until born. These foetal fishes bear at first little resemblance to the parent, being closely compressed and having the vertical fins exceedingly elevated. At birth they are 1½ to 2½ inches long, and similar to the adult in appearance, but more compressed and red in colour.

"'Since the discovery of their viviparity by Dr. Gibbons in 1854, these fishes have been of special interest to zoologists.

"'They are all fishes of our Pacific Coast, inhabiting bays and the surf on sandy shores, excepting the two species known from Japan. Several of them are found in brackish water and one inhabits fresh-water streams. The different species reach a length of 6 to 18 inches and are usually very abundant wherever found. They feed chiefly on small crustaceans and other invertebrates. None of them ranks high as a game fish though most of the species will take the baited hook and are able to make a fairly good fight. Nearly all the species are handsome fishes, some of them being very richly coloured.'

"To go into a description of every species would be a waste of time, but one meets with nearly all of them up and down the Californian Coast. At

Monterey Bay where we were fishing there was one not to be found elsewhere—*Abeona aurora*—a small fish of some six inches in length.

"Another fish sometimes called 'surf fish' is the California whiting—*Menticirrhus undulatus*—a fish greatly resembling the kingfish of the New Jersey beaches.

"The surf fish stopped annoying us after a while and the bass began striking. Inside of a half hour I beached the first one—seventeen and a half pounds.

"Shortly after this my father lost a very heavy fish. We saw it break water, and I judged roughly it was more than forty pounds. This made us very much excited.

"I followed with a twenty-pound fish, and after landing it, cast out again, to feel immediately a savage strike. This also was a large fish. He carried me down the beach for several hundred feet and then got off. He broke water twice. I feel sure he was the mate to the one Father hooked.

"Dad then took an eighteen pounder. He had considerable difficulty with it, due to the fact that the handle of his reel came loose during the fracas. I had to screw it on. And the bass was heading down the beach all the time. What with Father shouting to me to hurry and the bass jerking the tip of the rod violently, things were in a fine mess.

My fingers seemed all thumbs, but I finally got the handle on and the fish was soon landed.

"Then came a twenty-one-pound fish, followed by one thirteen and a half, and another eighteen and a half. This kept us exceedingly busy.

"Father felt tired, so went up in the dunes for a rest. I felt tired, myself, for to tell the truth, my arguments with these silvery warriors of the surf had not left me in as fresh a condition as beforehand. But I continued fishing alone.

"About one o'clock I had a hard, fast strike. I hooked the fish. It stripped more than three hundred feet of line from the reel before I could check it. Up the beach it ran, skirting the outer bar 'with the bit in its teeth.' It was a 'fightin' fish,' quite the most determined one I had yet encountered. For a time things looked dubious. The line continued to run steadily out, despite the fact I had both thumbs hard-pressed against the spool. Then it turned and ran in on me so swiftly that I could not reel fast enough to take up the slack.

"I thought I had lost it, but the line suddenly sung taut, and the merry battle was on once more. I got it coming on a great big roller, which slid it almost to my feet. That was the end. I was very tired, but when the bass pulled the scales down to twenty-four pounds I felt considerably better.

"I took about an hour's rest and went at it again. Shortly I had hold of a very heavy fish. I never saw this one. It ran out all my line and broke it.

"About five o'clock they stopped biting. We caught no more fish of any variety during the remainder of the afternoon. Took seven fish to-day, totalling 132½ pounds. Largest, 24 lbs."

August 22nd.

"Arrived at the beach about 7:30 A. M. Good surf, heavy fog, but no wind. Fished constantly all morning with no success. Great quantities of kelp and seaweed jockied about in the wash and continually tangled our lines.

"At noon the tide turned. Fog lifted and kelp and seaweed disappeared. Also the bass struck in about then and bit freely up until six o'clock.

"About four o'clock I had a fierce strike. For more than an hour I battled up and down the beach without seeing the fish. At one time I thought it was going to take all my line. It made hard, quick rushes that jabbed the rod savagely into my abdomen.

"Finally I got it in the undertow. And we saw we had a big bass. I took no chances, and rushing waist-deep into the water, thrust my hands through its gills. Staggering out on the sand, I fell down beside it, completely exhausted. The

pressure of the rod had been so severe that I was forced to rest for two hours before I began fishing again. This fish weighed an even thirty pounds.

I wandered up the beach late this afternoon. The sun was going down behind a wonderful bank of purple clouds. Even the sands seemed dyed with the same colour. I counted more than forty curlew running along the wash, sticking their long, pointed bills into the sand. They always kept just ahead of the waves, and upon my approach would jump into the air and fly swiftly off, barely skimming the crests of the incoming breakers. I would have given anything to have had my camera along. Like a fool, I left it with my rods. Next time I am going to see if I can't get some pictures of them along the wash. Six fish to-day, 118¼ lbs.; largest 30 lbs."

August 24th.

"Owing to some difficulty in procuring our usual supply of bait, we did not arrive at the beach until between twelve and one. Consequently lost half a day. Sun was shining brightly and it was decidedly warm.

"The bass seem to be striking best on the ebb. Fished up to 6:30 and only took five; mostly small. Total, 73½ lbs.; largest, 20 lbs. Better luck to-morrow."

September 1st.

High tide and heavy surf. Dense fog. Very cold. My fingers were so numbed I could hardly turn the handle of my reel. Our clothing was soaked with mist.

"Surf fish and crabs nibbled away our baits during the whole flood. Most aggravating. Could not keep a bait on, though we tied them securely to our hooks.

"Tide changed in the afternoon and the stripers came in. They struck fast and furiously.

"Saw great quantities of shearwater ducks to-day. I can't remember when I have seen so many so close inshore before. They literally covered the water, in acres, it seemed to me. They appeared to be feeding on anchovies.

"About five o'clock my father hooked a very large bass. It broke water on its first rush and we both saw it distinctly. I baited up with a fresh sardine and cast out while he was still fighting his fish. It carried him down the beach until the fog obscured him from my view.

"In three quarters of an hour he came back and said that after a long rush of more than four hundred feet it had fought free. This fish, I should judge, was nearly fifty pounds.

"Took six fish to-day. Total, 94½ lbs.; largest, 19¾ lbs."

September 2nd.

"Light surf. Heavy fog, but warmer than yesterday. Did not feel at all uncomfortable.

"Caught the morning ebb. Had nice fresh bait and everything looked promising. Started fishing at 7 A. M. At 7:20 had a swift strike and beached a twenty-and-a-half-pounder. This elated us very much.

"Thousands of sea-gulls on the beach this morning. Last night's high tide cast up great quantities of anchovies and they were feeding on them. These must have been the anchovies we saw the shearwaters feeding on yesterday. When we approached the gulls they would all take the air by running swiftly along the sand and then launching themselves on outspread wings. They reminded me of airplanes.

"My father took a sixteen-and-a-half-pound bass, and while he was fighting it, he called out something to me. But I could not distinguish what he said due to the noise the gulls were making. I never heard such a sound. They were fighting and quarrelling over the anchovies, in veritable clouds.

"About ten-thirty the bass stopped biting. Could not understand it for a while as the tide was not scheduled to turn for another hour.

"Suddenly my line started running out in great sweeps. Then I knew. I threw all my weight

against the rod in the hope of breaking the line, but it held. I was hooked to a gigantic shark. He jumped at least six feet out of water. My father yelled in excitement. But it was soon over. The line went out so fast that I was unable to distinguish it at all. When at last it broke, the shark had forced me into the surf nearly to my waist. If one fished solely for sharks and with shark rigging, what wonderful sport he could have!

"Caught a croaker to-day. Father caught several. Have not seen them so far north in any great numbers before. This fish must not be confused with the croaker common on the Atlantic seaboard (*Micropogon undulatus*). The fish we caught are indigenous to the Pacific. It is sometimes called queenfish. Classified correctly it is *Seriphus politus*. It is excellent eating. I have seen great numbers of these fish taken from boats and piers farther south. They also take a fish down there called a yellowfin.

"The yellowfin (*Cynoscion parvipinnis*) is in reality the California bluefish. It looks very much like the Eastern squeteague and is delicious eating. It is steel-blue in colour with yellowish anal, ventral and pectoral fins. Sometimes found in company with it is the corvina or corbina. This latter is sometimes taken in great numbers from the piers at Venice, Ocean Beach, etc.

"Only four stripers to-day, the smallest of the whole trip. But we can't complain. We have certainly had our share. During our stay we have taken thirty-three fish with a combined weight of 557½ pounds, the largest weighing 30 lbs. This includes only the bass taken by my father and myself and does not include the 41-lb. fish caught by Mr. Ralph Stienon in the mouth of the Salinas River.

"The bait used by us at all times was sardine. The head of the sardine would be severed, and the lobes of the caudal fin cut off. The hook was then imbedded in the side of the sardine below the dorsal and the shank lashed to the tail by means of two half hitches of the leader. When held up, the bait hung head downward. It must be borne in mind that the sardines were not the size of those one generally sees in cans, but larger; sometimes running as high as a quarter of a pound or more.

"Our outfits were of the regulation surf-angling type, with 8-0 or 9-0 hooks, 4 oz. Pyramid sinkers, and 12-thread linen line. Instead of the usual gut leader, however, we employed a No. 30 line, approximately 18 inches long. This was much heavier than the gut and not so apt to cut through the sardine when casting."

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From the foregoing notes one can gain a very clear impression of the possibilities offered the surf angler on the Pacific Coast. There are many varieties of fish to be found along the dune-flanked surf, such as the surf fish, corbina, croaker, yellowfin, etc., etc., of which mention has already been made, but they are not to be spoken with in the same breath as the lordly striper.

The striped bass is not a native of Pacific waters. It is the result of artificial propagation, being planted by the United States and California fish commissions, as nearly as I can ascertain, around 1870. The fish have thrived and multiplied to such an extent that to-day the yearly catch of striped bass constitutes one of the most important items in the list of California fisheries.

Pacific surf fishing is a comparatively young sport; all surf fishing is for that matter. But the disciples on the Atlantic side seem just now to be in the majority.

There is no reason why, however, in a few years, the miles of glorious white-capped breakers of the vast ocean discovered by Balboa should not each season claim their quota of devotees to one of the most healthful, thrilling, and magnificent sports that exists in God's great Out-of-Doors!

THE LURE OF THE LONELY BEACH

You say you have lived in, and loved the wild,
  Where the arms of nature reach,
You say you have loved it but have you known
  The lure of the lonely beach?

Have you seen the dawn flare flame in the east,
  And heard the gray gulls cry,
And heard the Little Voices call
  As the breeze goes whispering by?

Have you felt the "lift" of a channel bass,
  And stood with bated breath
To cope with the coppery comet's rush
  In his struggle for life or death?

Have you stood on the sands in a northeast storm,
  In an awe too deep for speech?
You say you have lived? Have you ever known
  The lure of the lonely beach?

PHILIP ARNOLD LA VIE.

CHAPTER XI

BEACH CAMPING

A TENT on the beach offers opportunity for healthful recreation and for wholesome adventure that is scarce equalled by the camp of forest or mountain, and the fact also that many of the best fishing points along the coast are so isolated that unless one carries his hotel with him it is impossible to taste the joys they have to offer, gives an added importance to the present chapter.

Either as a location for a permanent camp, a week-end jaunt, or a mere hiking expedition, the beach has rare possibilities, and yet I have known more than one individual, after a single experience, to raise on high a mosquito-bitten hand and to solemnly pronounce, "Never again!" I give fair warning that many things may come to pass upon the beach which will test the temper and the gameness of the camper, and yet to the red-blooded man or woman these very disturbing elements go far to make the game worth while. Ordinarily, no great hardship is entailed. It is

only small inconveniences and aggravations many times repeated and multiplied, which are to be put up with.

Of course one must go with the expectation of roughing it to a certain extent. If home comforts are demanded or required there are numberless hotels along the coast which offer a varying degree of hospitality in exchange for a more or less modest stipend.

Storm and wind and driving rain, drifting sand, the heat of the solar rays, a dearth of water, and at some seasons insect pests of a half dozen varieties—these are the adverse elements and conditions which have worked disaster to many a party which has entered upon a period of beach camping with the hearts of the individuals brimming over with happiness and joyous anticipation but poorly equipped so far as a practical knowledge of this branch of camp-craft is concerned.

Since my first couple of trips I have made a practice of camping on the beach a dozen times or more each season. Sometimes these are fishing ventures pure and simple, when we travel light. Now and then there are womenfolk in the party, and at these times our excess of equipment would cause the eyes of an English tourist to pop out in envy. And sometimes I go it alone on long

hikes, when my entire assortment of duffle is crammed into the mouth of a moderate-sized pack-sack.

The outfit may range from the simplest layout, costing only a few dollars, to an elaborate collection of camp-equipment running high into three figures, but while the purchase of cheap articles of camp furnishings is poor policy in the long run, a very serviceable equipment may be purchased at a moderate outlay if each article is wisely chosen.

A perfect camp—which, by the way, is something that has never yet been constructed—would mean one absolutely free from insect pests, one into which the wind-blown sand did not penetrate, one safeguarded from rain and moisture, and with an adequate amount of shade and a bounteous supply of cool, pure water, for drinking, cooking, and washing. We cannot achieve all these luxuries and comforts in their entirety, but we can come mighty near to it if we go about it wisely.

SHELTERS

The tent is of course the most important and the most expensive item of equipment. Either oil silk, tanalite, or one of the other light, water-proof materials is best where weight and bulk is a matter to be considered, though canvas is far stronger and less liable to tear. I have seen

several oil silk tents badly ripped when the winds swept across the low sand spits.

Unless the shelter is of such a shape that it offers little resistance to the wind, it must be backed against a dune, or a pile of drift, though even in this case a shifting of the wind may make necessary a complete reorganization of the entire camp. The tent should have an opening that can be easily and effectively closed by a curtain of bobbinet, as a green fly and mosquito preventative, unless it has a complete inner covering of the same material.

There are fifty or more models upon the market many of which have particularly desirable features, and many others which have nothing to distinguish them but dubious selling points. One of the best all-round tents, and one which I have found particularly well adapted for beach camping, is the old type, square miner's pattern. This tent can be erected with a single pole, it affords the maximum of room for the amount of material that goes into its construction, and aside from the round, single-pole tent, or the red-man's lodge house, it offers less surface to a gale than any canvas shelter ever invented. No matter in what direction the wind is blowing, there is naught but a slanting surface or a corner to obstruct its passage. This miner's tent has abundant head

room, is easily put up, and by the addition of a single bobbinet flap is made mosquito proof. The Fraser tent, which is a slight modification of the miner's shelter, is also a practical model, though the quite inadequate fly in front is of no earthly use on the beach so far as I have been able to discover. The canoe tent, with its square back and rounded front, has advantages, yet it is a difficult shelter to make mosquito proof because of the sloping opening.

The Baker and the Amazon are perhaps the most comfortable of all tents, with their ample height and floor space, and the generous fly, which may be closed tightly at night. There is space for a tent stove, for use in early spring and autumn, room for wall pockets, and bully points from which to hang wet garments and other odds and ends. The expanse of horizontal canvas in front is a bad feature in stormy weather, and the fact that three poles are required in its erection removes it from the class of perfect beach shelters. However, I have enjoyed many a week on the beach with this type of tent as my home and refuge, and at certain seasons of the year I find it very satisfactory, especially when there are members of the gentler sex in the party.

The plain A or wedge tent is the least desirable of all canvas shelters to my notion, excepting

when the outing is taken in a country where poles are easily cut, and when a camp stove forms part of the equipment.

Sod cloths are a necessity, of course, but the ground cloth may be replaced with that very serviceable article, the poncho.

On a hiking trip any of the low types of tents erecting with a single pole are entirely adequate so long as they can be kept free from insects. The smaller it is, the better, of course, for on these jaunts every pound added to the weight on the shoulder blades must be considered.

Probably the most satisfactory method of making a tent insect-proof is by the addition of an inner tent the same size and shape as the outer covering, constructed of cheesecloth or bobbinet. This is attached to the ridge pole, or the peak, and hangs loosely, the sides being made extra long so that they may be weighted down at the edges.

The shifting beach sand offers no very stable foundation, and so particular care must be taken to cut the tent stakes extra long, and they should be driven in deeply. In banking the tent each smallest opening must be covered, to prevent the ingress of mosquitoes, and it is a wise plan to stuff the grommet holes in which the poles are inserted with moss or paper. A fly, either one extending directly from the tent or one erected

upon four poles, is a great convenience. It serves the purpose of a dining room and as a lounging place at those times when the fish are off their feed.

STOVES AND COOKING FIRES

I rarely carry a camp stove to the beach, yet I appreciate their convenience under certain conditions. The greatest cause of worry to the camp chef is the constantly drifting sand which has a tendency to creep into every pot and pan around the fire unless they are tightly covered. A stove within a shelter obviates this nuisance, yet I love the open fire with its ample cooking space and its varied degrees of heat. I know that I can cook a better meal and do it quicker over the open fire, with its log backing and the convenient crane and pot-hooks, and I know, too, that I get a heap more pleasure from my labours. The sand nuisance can be practically eliminated by the erection of wind-breaks of drift wood, which is usually easy to gather on the beach.

Perhaps because my early training in wood-craft was in a region where camp grates and reflector bakers were unknown, I have never fallen very hard for either one of these inventions. Any grate that is small enough and light enough to be easily carried is too small to be of any great

practical worth, and if one has the knack of it, just as good bread can be baked in a frying pan as can be produced with the aid of the reflector. In fact, in the shifting winds of the beach the reflector is an exceedingly undependable article unless it is used in conjunction with the camp stove. A light-weight dutch oven—not the iron variety—is much more practical under the conditions we have to contend with.

During rainy weather the camp stove is a blessing, and only at these times of storm do I really regret my penchant for the more primitive method of cooking.

It is well to back the open fire with a log, or even to lay two logs or timbers parallel, with the fire between. A stake planted at either end with a pole fastened between forms the crane. One five feet in length will accommodate three kettles with sufficient space in between for frying pans or planking boards. Wire pot-hooks of various sizes are a great convenience, for with their use the pots and kettles may be hung at any desired height above the flames. I always make a practice of attaching a stick several feet in length to the handle of the frying pan. This allows the chef to flap flap-jacks, or to fry fish without being himself either fried or blinded by the smoke.

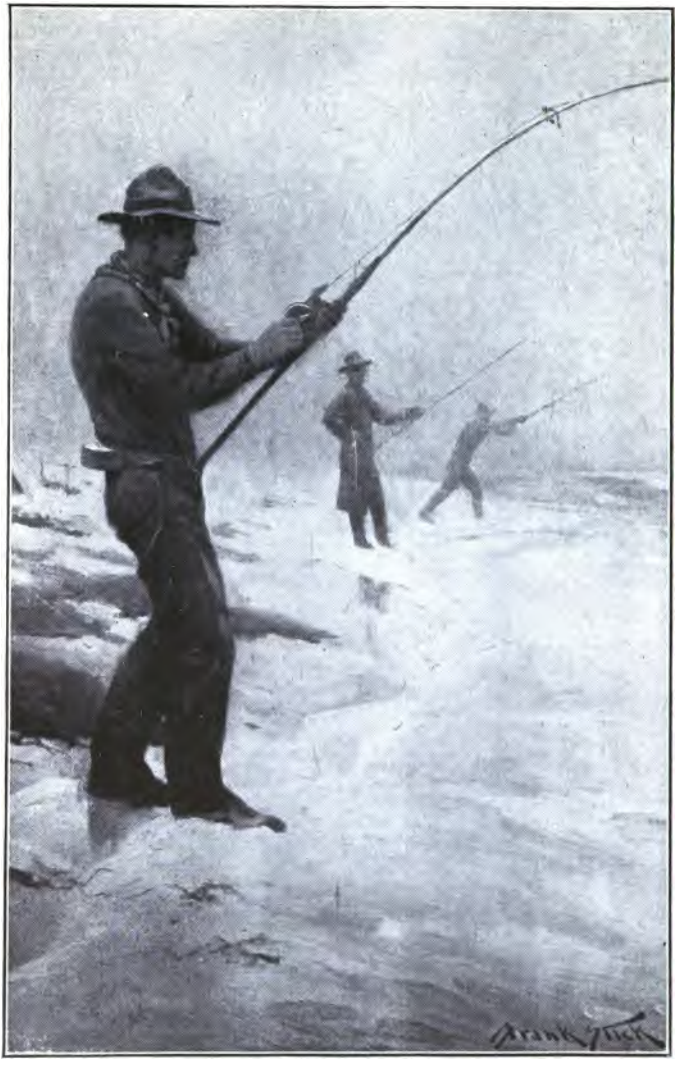
Upon a steady, open fire, and with the proper

utensils and ingredients may be prepared as appetizing and zestful a meal as any city hotel or restaurant can offer, and one that will be relished, in fact, far more than any repast eaten in the city, for the ocean air and the active life of the open are conducive to a brand of appetite that would be the envy of any metropolitan epicure. Concerning the choice and the preparation of the food I will have more to say farther on in this chapter.

COOKING UTENSILS

Most of the aluminum cooking outfits advertised by the sporting goods houses and outfitters are satisfactory, though beware of the small pocket kits which are suitable only for a picnic or a day's hike. The aluminum frying pan, which accompanies most of the outfits, should be replaced by one of iron or steel.

The only advantage in purchasing a standard outfit is the fact that the different articles are so constructed that they nest snugly and occupy but little space. It is cheaper, of course, to purchase each article separately from a regular dealer, and if the selection is wisely made they can be so arranged as to pack in a small space. The Armor-steel outfits are quite satisfactory, and the price is about one third that of the aluminum construction.



"A blue, gray morning, with white spume drifting in from the sea, and the low breakers sending their froth about our ankles."

"Into the Great Gamble."

Aluminum cups I do not care for, as they are entirely too positive as conductors of heat, and for this reason I prefer to carry a heavy china cup or one of enamelware. The old-fashioned steel knives and forks with wooden handles cannot be improved upon, in my estimation.

If the pieces are purchased separately care should be taken to see that the pots and kettles are constructed of one piece, as solder will not withstand the heat of a campfire. The ordinary coffee and tea pots are quite useless, as they have a tendency to lose spout or handle, or both, at the most inopportune time. Unless one cares to put the money into one of the aluminum camp pots, with its convenient folding handle and bale, it is better to depend upon a seamless bucket with cover for camp brews.

BEDS

In most cases sea moss will be found strewn upon the beach in such abundance that a sufficient amount for a comfortable mattress may be gathered in the course of a half hour or less. It should be spread out to dry for a few hours, and then laid evenly from a depth of a foot, at the point where the shoulders and hips of the sleepers are to rest, to a depth of six inches at the foot of the bed. When moss cannot be procured, the coarse beach

grass makes a fairly comfortable bed, though it is more difficult to gather, of course, and the average camper will stop far short of an adequate amount. I have slept many a night with nought beneath my shoulder blades but the soft sea sand, and slept well, though by no stretch of the imagination could such a resting place be termed a "downy bed of ease," as some poetic individuals have claimed. Shallow depressions pawed in the sand to fit the hips and shoulders are considerable aid to a dreamless night. Whatever the bed, whether moss, or grass, or salt hay, or bare sand, a rubber poncho or sod cloth should be spread beneath the blankets to keep out moisture. Those pneumatic contraptions, called Blow Beds, in the west, are entirely too cold a proposition, and too liable to puncture to find favour with the seasoned camper. A light camp cot is preferable, under average conditions, though the circulation of cold air beneath makes necessary a double supply of blankets. There are few sections where browse of some sort cannot be procured, and it is usually worth a bit of trouble in the long run.

The new Kapok mattress is light and extremely serviceable, and where the matter of bulk is no consideration it is entirely worth while. The stretcher bed, which is simply a strip of canvas thirty by seventy-six inches in diameter, with

loops at the corners for the attachment of horizontal poles, makes a good couch, but it requires considerable time and care to elevate it properly, and it is not always possible to procure poles of a proper length and thickness.

Blankets are of course the most practicable coverings for the camp bed, and they should be as nearly all wool as possible. The old Hudson Bay two and three point blanket is the warmest and most serviceable article of its kind ever produced, but it is difficult to procure excepting in the North country. Sleeping bags are too stuffy and bulky for beach camping. Whatever the bedding, it must be aired frequently, for dampness gathers quickly by the salt water.

INCIDENTALS

On any sort of an extended trip it is worth while to carry a half axe—which is one of two and a half pounds weight—though on a short jaunt a belt axe will answer very well. Most of the wood that is picked upon the beach is found in conveniently short sections, or in the shape of boards, and requires very little working up. The full-sized tool of the woodsman is never required.

Either a candle lantern or a combination affair which burns either candles or oil, is the best for beach work. The Stonebridge folding

lantern is one of the niftiest little articles I have ever run across for a go-light trip, and notwithstanding its rather fragile appearance it is seaworthy and entirely satisfactory for general camp use. The small carbide lanterns are too easily blown out to be of service on the beach, where winds prevail. Unless the lantern is made of aluminum, it should be given a coat of paint, as tin or steel is inclined to rust quickly under the action of salt air. For night fishing, a small electric torch is a convenience in rebaiting, slaughtering skates, etc.

A canvas wash-basin, which folds flat and takes up but little room, is decidedly worth while, and the cost is small. To make one's toilet in the stew kettle, even on a camping trip, is in rather bad taste to my notion, and if the cook happens to possess an irascible nature, it may also prove to be poor judgment as well.

I usually carry with me a small cloth bag which, when stuffed with moss or grass, makes a serviceable pillow, though a bundle of cast-off clothing will answer the same purpose, for the tired camper is not apt to be finicky in these small matters.

The entire equipment may be packed in canvas duffle bags, and packsacks, which are waterproof and easily handled. Nothing is more conducive

to wrath in a seasoned camper than to discover his campmates toting in their duffle in boxes and trunks. The foodstuff should have their separate bags, and so with the bedding and general equipment. My personal outfit goes in a medium-sized packsack fitted with shoulder straps and tump line, so in case I am tempted on a lone hike a means of carriage is always ready.

The cooking kit should have a separate bag, and the pots and frying pans may be protected with strips of canvas.

Tent pegs, and in the case of a small shelter, even tent poles, may be left at home, for the beach is usually found littered with boards and strips of convenient size for working up.

THE PERSONAL KIT

What articles go into the duffle bag which one reserves for personal belongings depends greatly upon individual taste, yet there are certain odd pieces of equipment which are necessary to the welfare and the comfort of the camper no matter what his or her mental and physical makeup may be.

Above all, the bag should contain several pieces of wearing apparel for the protection of the camper not only against cold and dampness but for the discouragement of insect pests as well. I

don't know but what the head net should lead this small list of special articles, for more than any other single piece of equipment, this bit of netting may prove a boom, and may go far toward making the beach livable when conditions are at their worst. Of course there will be many trips when the net is not removed from the bag, and weeks may pass without a mosquito being in evidence. Then there comes a soft west wind, with perhaps a drizzle of rain, and the mosquitoes are upon you in hordes, filling the sky like grains of sand in a desert storm. Then as you slip your head into the protecting folds of the net do you heap blessings upon its unknown inventor.

The most convenient type of head net is the simple arrangement of looped wire and bobbinet, weighted at the bottom. Several of the more elaborate arrangements are too complicated for convenience. Whatever the model, it should be generous in girth, and long enough to hang six or eight inches below the neck band. Some genius has developed a head net with a rubber nipple through which the stem of a pipe may be inserted. The fact that he did not make this opening generous enough in diameter to allow the smoker to expectorate has kept it from attaining great popularity among fishermen.

No mosquito dope can be depended upon on the

beach, as no preparation, unless it had the consistency of spar varnish, would withstand the action of salt spray. The hands are usually protected by cotton gloves when the mosquitoes are out in force.

Excepting for a month or two in mid-summer, hip boots are a necessity if one would fish in comfort, and in real rough weather a pair of slicker oilskin trousers, cut off at the knee, are a bully addition to the boots, and will save many a wetting.

To my notion, no combination of garments is quite so satisfactory for beach camping and fishing as a heavy duck hunting coat supplemented by a heavy sweater. Duck or khaki is about as near wind-proof as any cloth we can procure, and the sweater stores up and retains the body heat. Then, too, this combination will keep out any but a heavy rainfall for some time; the wrist bands are an added protection against cold and insects, and the generous pockets are a blessing. A leather coat is a fine garment for extremely cold weather, but it is a bit heavy for average use.

The ubiquitous mackinaw is about as generally unsatisfactory on the beach, and in fact, in most other regions, as anything in the clothing line I have ever run across. The wind sifts through it as though it were composed of cheese cloth, and

it is far too bulky to wear beneath a really wind-proof coat. Excepting in the heavily wooded country of the north, where high winds are not experienced, it is of little value. A heavy stagged shirt, such as is worn in the northwest, is far better from every standpoint.

Unless the party is going extremely light, some sort of water-proof covering should be carried. This may be either the very serviceable poncho—which is used as a rubber blanket or ground cloth, at night—a light raincoat, or slicker. The short oilskin which accompanies the slicker trousers is the best all-round garment, though it is a bit heavy to pack, and is apt to become extremely gummy with much use.

A felt hat of good quality, with a soft though not too floppy brim, cannot be improved upon as a head covering. A small woollen skull cap is a comfort at night, particularly if nature has been unkind in the matter of hirsute protection.

Canvas shoes are welcome around camp. They take up but little space, and dry out quickly, without shrinking. Woollen socks should be worn next the feet, in conjunction with rubber boots, and these protected in turn by cotton stockings or cloth arctics. Excepting during the very warmest weather, light woollen underwear is the safest and most comfortable, though I

have seldom known a cold to result from even the most severe wetting by salt water.

A large silk handkerchief or even a red bandana will find numerous uses, aside from the purpose for which it is generally intended. Toilet articles are entirely up to the individual, my only suggestion being that they be carried in a water-proof toilet roll or bag along with such simple anesthetics, bandages, sewing articles, etc., as common sense will suggest the need of.

WATER

On the beach the difficulty of procuring fresh water is frequently an important problem. Unless the camp is pitched within walking distance of a well the only alternative is to carry a sufficient amount to last through the duration of the trip. A hole may be sunk in the sand deep enough to produce a seepage of what is usually a poor substitute for the genuine article. The resulting, milky saline-flavoured fluid will sustain life and that is about all that can be said for it.

On a long trip kegs or crated water bottles may be used as containers. On a short jaunt canvas water buckets and canvas bottles are more convenient, as they pack snugly when not in use, and can be suspended in the shade of a board or a strip of canvas when full. I am not in favour of

those bottles designed to cool their contents through seepage and evaporation, for the simple reason that on the beach fresh water is entirely too valuable a commodity to waste even a minimum amount in this manner.

More than once I have replenished my supply during a rainfall by lining a depression in the sand with a rubber poncho, but of course this means cannot be depended upon.

The sea water can be used for washing dishes and for toilet purposes, by the use of salt water soap or even washing soda. On a pinch, potatoes and other vegetables may be boiled in the sea water, though in the process of cooking they acquire a flavour which is distasteful to some.

Canteens are convenient on side trips, while vacuum bottles are heavy and hard to handle. Excepting upon those rare occasions when weight and bulk is not considered, I never bother with them.

GRUB

The choice of foodstuffs and their preparation is perhaps the most important phase of the camping game, for this is a matter which controls the health of the party. There is a belief among the uninitiated that campers are in the habit of subsisting chiefly upon half-raw bacon and hard-

tack. "What do you eat in camp?" This is the first question that the average ruffled and belaced young thing will put to the veteran, and it is usually answered by a snort of disgust, for there are few dishes served upon the home table that cannot be duplicated over the campfire. And these dishes, attacked with a hearty zest and an appetite unknown in urban environments take to themselves a flavour marvellously appealing.

Cooking—though it is generally so considered—is not an art, for all arts depend to a considerable extent upon native talent. Cooking, particularly cooking over an open fire, is simply a matter of practical common sense and of practice. Some men and some women never make good cooks, but this does not indicate a lack of talent, but rather the failure to give proper thought to the matter. One who is familiar with the peculiar attributes of an open fire can prepare a half dozen or more dishes at the same time, and serve them all piping hot at their appointed time. Yet for several years I hunted and camped with a woodsman whose system it was to cook one article at a time, eat it, and then continue with the next item on the menu. This method was continued until our appetites were satisfied, or more often, until our patience was exhausted. Needless to say, while

he was superintending the campfire, our meals were long-drawn-out affairs and, on the whole, decidedly unsatisfactory.

I do not remember that either my health or my palate has ever really suffered while in camp, and on more than one occasion I have turned to the camp kitchen in preference to taking a chance with hotels of doubtful salutariness. I remember, for instance, a certain hunting trip in the Rockies, during the snowy period of early winter. When our trail trended close to an out-of-the-way sportsman's resort, we determined to break our march for a couple of days in order to enjoy what we fondly imagined would be the comforts of home. We had mental visions of cakes and pastry, jams and sass, and even of apple pie, which was something our souls cried out for,—for we were fed up on the simple camp fare to which our means of transportation limited us. When the outfit was unpacked and the horses turned into the corral, we filed into the log-raftered dining room with appetites and expectations soaring. Our meal that night consisted of elk steak—from a quarter we had presented to our host—potatoes fried in scathers of grease, corn bread, and as a final blow to our hopes—rice pudding, or "Spotted pup," in the vernacular of the west. Each and all of these items we had been consuming in vast

quantities for the past month, and more wholesomely prepared at that. And so we arose and staggered from the table with shattered visions, paid our bill, and hiked again for the mountains.

Successful camp cookery does not depend upon committing to memory numberless more or less complicated receipts, nor does it depend upon the toting of a cook book, but rather upon the absorbing by the camper of a few cardinal principles which may be applied in the composition of a hundred savoury dishes.

The elaborateness of the camp menu is determined, of course, by the variety of the foodstuffs which are carried, but it is surprising what a varied and wholesome an assortment of dishes may be prepared from an exceedingly limited larder by an experienced cook.

The frying pan, because it is the easiest and quickest to use, of our utensils, is usually very much overworked in the camp as well as in the average home. When small ills appear on a camping expedition they are frequently traceable to this relic of our early American ancestors. Yet if it is properly used, and in moderation, many tasty and healthful dishes may be produced, and there are certain foodstuffs which are better fried, or broiled in the skillet, than prepared in any other way. Two rules may be followed. Either

use very little grease—a mere brushing of the skillet—or use a great deal. If the article to be cooked is immersed in smoking hot fat very little grease is absorbed, and it comes to the table crisp, and browned to a delicate golden hue. Fish, French fried potatoes, fried oysters, etc., should be cooked in this manner. In cooking flapjacks, frying pan bread, fritters, and other mixtures which rise in the pan, just enough grease is used to prevent the batter from burning. The same rule applied to steaks and chops the result will be about the same as broiling.

Fish may be planked as perfectly before the open campfire as in the finest city grill. Any clean board picked up on the beach will answer for the purpose. The fish to be cooked is scaled, split down the belly, and tacked to the plank, flesh side out, and tail above, with a half-dozen wire nails. A couple of strips of bacon pinned above the fish, so that the fat will drip over and permeate the flesh, add appreciably to the flavour. Care should be taken to place the board to the windward of the fire. Either the lower end of the board is sharpened, or a sharp stake may be nailed to it, so as to serve as a support, when implanted in the sand. If the board is heated well before the fish is placed upon it the process of cooking is more rapid. On more than one occasion I have

baked a very good quality of bread in this same manner by mixing the dough a trifle thicker than usual.

Small fish may be broiled very nicely, impaled on a stick and suspended over live coals. Large fish are very good baked in the coals. In this process the fish is cleaned but not scaled, and is then wrapped in at least a dozen thicknesses of wet newspaper and buried in the hot ashes. The time and the intensity of the heat required can only be determined by practice. Potatoes may be baked in the same manner, excepting that less covering is needed.

When meats and fish are to be stewed, they should be immersed in boiling water, and all finny creatures are first sewed up snugly in a clean cloth. Clams, mussels, and crabs require very little cooking, and only a small quantity of water is used. In fact, they should be steamed rather than boiled.

Most fresh vegetables are easily prepared, and the more the natural flavour is left in evidence, the better. Few varieties served on the home table cannot be prepared to as good advantage in camp.

Fruit should hold an important place on the camp diet list, especially acid fruits. Fresh fruit has a tendency to decay quickly, and besides they

are bulky and hard to handle. They can with advantage be replaced by several varieties of dried fruit, such as prunes, apples, apricots, and raisins. All of these fruits work up well in sauce, and with the addition of rice, flour, corn meal, or even breakfast food, tasty puddings may be concocted. Either of the cereals, compounded with a small quantity of fruit and sugar, a pinch of salt, and a bit of flavouring, such as cinnamon or nutmeg, and either boiled or baked, will result in a dessert that will make the camper think of home. Such fruits as raisins, currants, and prunes, mixed with flour, chopped bacon or salt pork, and a teaspoonful of baking powder, then placed in a bag, which has previously been dipped in boiling water and floured, will result, after boiling for half an hour, in the plum duff of nautical fame. I remember one day in the north woods a boon companion whose day it was to superintend the culinary operations planned and executed a meal in which this tasty dish was to play an important part. Unfortunately, at the last minute he was unable to find a cloth of the desired size and degree of cleanliness, so he used in its stead a new bandana handkerchief which had reposed in the bottom of his duffle bag. The result, however, was such a riot of colour that even the cook himself refused to partake of the mess.

"Down Barnegat way."

"Each year finds more women yielding to the enchantments of surf fishing."

Beach camping reverses several precedents and rules of woodcraft which hold good in other sections. For instance, unless one is engaged in a back packing trip, the addition of a few cans of preserved fruit is not only allowable but advisable. The fact that most canned fruits contain about ninety-five per cent. of water is an argument in favour of their use, for fruit juices are a very healthful and acceptable form of liquid. Nothing can be more refreshing, at the end of a hot day on the beach, than a can of juicy, golden peaches; such fruit as Frank Stockton had in mind when he wrote his "Christmas Wreck."

While most of the canned vegetables are rather bulky, for the amount of nourishment they contain, a few tins of corn, baked beans, or succotash will not make a great addition to the packs, and they are exceedingly convenient for quick lunches. The canned corn can be used to good advantage, also, in the preparation of fritters. Dried navy beans, lima beans, split peas, and rice, are among the best of camp foods.

On short jaunts sufficient bread may be carried to last the duration of the trip, particularly if supplemented with a few packages of crackers or hardtack. On long vacations, where the camp is located far from the source of supply, either raised or unleavened bread may be prepared. Frying

pan bread and biscuits are a simple combination of flour, salt, baking powder, and a bit of shortening, if one has it. The mixture is combined with water, to the proper consistency, and when it is to be cooked in the frying pan, the loaf—if such it may be termed—is removed from the pan, after being browned on one side, and stood up on its side, close to the fire. Or it may be left in the pan, and the utensil propped against a stake. First-class camp bread and bannock are attained only after some practice. It is a good plan to do very little kneading, and in the case of biscuits, to drop the dough into the pan, instead of cutting it, as cutting requires a thicker batter, which results in heavy bread. Equal parts of corn meal and flour are used in the preparation of corn bread, and an egg is added, if this happens to be on the grub list. The latter, by the way, may be carried, packed in a bucket, with flour or corn meal, or, for a short trip, they can be broken into a friction top tin.

Unleavened bread is wholesome, and when one is accustomed to it, it takes the place of light bread very nicely. The best of the unleavened products is the corn pone of the South. This consists simply of corn meal, salt, a teaspoonful of sugar, and water. A tablespoon of shortening to a pint of meal, adds somewhat to the flavour. This is made into a thick batter, and baked crisp

in a well-greased skillet, or, if you prefer the Southern darkies' way, it may be baked in the ashes, in the nude.

Prepared pancake flour is convenient to use, and results in as tasty a flapjack as the average cook can produce. Since boyhood, the Aunt Jemima brand has always had a place on my food list. It requires merely the addition of water, as powdered milk is contained in the mixture.

Bacon and salt pork are old standbys in camp. Butter may be packed in friction top cans, and kept, along with other perishables, in a box sunk in the sand. Lard or Crisco also goes in a can. Both evaporated and canned milk are to my notion about as wholesome as the fresh article, but this may be because I have accustomed myself to their use through necessity, when I lived for many months at a stretch in regions where bovine critters were unknown.

Oatmeal, Pettijohns, Cream of Wheat, and Farina are all easily prepared breakfast foods, and "wery, wery fillin'." All of these cereals are good sliced, when cold, and fried in bacon fat.

Both powdered milk and egg powder are among the most satisfactory of the condensed foods when used in conjunction with other foods. They are light in weight, and a very small quantity will go a long way. The desiccated vegetables are a

poor excuse for the fresh article, but they will support life on a pinch. Erbswurst, which is a powdered pea soup, contained in a bologna-shaped package, is nourishing and compact, but rather tasteless unless combined with boiled pork cubes, or flavoured with butter. I have used many a pound of it, however, on really hard trips, when the packs were cut down to the bare essentials.

As beverages I stick pretty close to coffee for the morning meal, with tea for lunch and dinner, but this is a matter of individual taste. Tea is the most sustaining and the best thirst quencher of any beverage I know of, and in the northern country it is a universal drink. A can of chocolate—which is more nourishing than cocoa—comes in mighty nicely for a change, and when fishing the night tides it is very refreshing in conjunction with a midnight feed.

The grub should be packed in parafin bags, which come in various sizes. It is a good plan to have a special place and an individual bag for each article, and to have the contents plainly marked on the outside. This latter expedient will save a deal of confusion when mealtime comes around.

A great deal has been written concerning saccharine tablets as a substitute for sugar. In

my own estimation, this sweetening is highly unsatisfactory, so far as flavour and food value are concerned, and I suspect it to be positively injurious. Whenever possible I carry sugar, and plenty of it, and excepting on packing trips I add a can or two of syrup as sweetening for flapjacks and puddings.

When the food supplies are to be augmented with fish, clams, oysters, or game, as is usually the case on beach camping expeditions, two pounds of food a day, per head, is sufficient. That is supposing the supplies to consist of such highly nourishing and concentrated foods as I have mentioned. Where a large quantity of watery foodstuffs such as potatoes, canned vegetables, fresh bread, etc., are carried, it is necessary to increase the amount somewhat. Then, too, there is a vast difference in individual requirement. I have camped with men who could and did surround what would be a day's allowance for the average individual, in a single meal, then hang around to scrape the kettle. In any case it is better to figure heavy than to run the chance of going hungry, for I can assure the reader that there are few things which will more quickly take the joy out of life than to be forced to substitute a notch in the belt, for a square meal.

. . . . . .

What is it, that something within us which tempts us, nay, which forces us out of the beaten trail of urbane environments, and sends us to the lone camp in forest, or mountain, or on the wild sea beach? A reversion to the primitive is it, a throwback, as we say in the West, or only a bit remaining of that same idealistic, romantic spirit of adventure which sent our early explorers harking into the wilderness?

Primitive instinct, or pioneer spirit, whichever it may be, it is not entirely a male characteristic. Not by any means. As a matter of fact, a woman, if she be of normal strength, and normal in her ideals and ideas, is every bit as good a companion in camp as the average male. In truth—and this may sound like a plea for suffrage, which it is not—she is apt to be sportier in facing difficulties, and less inclined to complain over small mishaps than the He members of the party. For when you come right down to it, most men receive more petting and coddling, and are apt to be more exacting in their demands than are their sisters and wives. I speak now of those who dwell in large communities, where the different levels of society are more in evidence, and where the man pays for service, and demands that it be forthcoming. In rural and backwoods districts this condition does not exist.

The niceties and the multitudinous conveniences of civilization have a tendency to not only weaken the stamina, but to lessen the adaptability of a race, and the result is that the average man is a slave to habit and to practice. Things run pretty much in a set groove from one year's end to the next, and if he is forced out of his routine, if his system is disarranged, it causes uneasiness.

A camping trip, particularly where a bit of hardship is forthcoming, means a total disorganization of his system and of his rules of living. A girl or a woman is apt to show up better under these changed conditions than a man, because, while she may be just as much a slave to convention, she is far less a slave to habit, and besides, she has so much more romance in her nature that the real spirit of the out-of-doors pervades her innermost being, and she is apt to exist in a state of ecstatic mental exhilaration throughout the trip.

I do not wish to imply that individually men are not better campers than women, for such is not the case. The male is the natural hunter and fisherman, the provider, and if his environments and his training have given him experience in the life of the open, or without great experience, if his desires and his impulses are toward the out-of-doors, then is he one to tie to. He is a sportsman.

I have my own conception of a sportsman, and

sportsmanship has a definite meaning to me. The mere desire to go out and kill game or fish, or the ability to do either, this does not make a sportsman, and just as surely a fondness for sitting around a campfire and warbling airs of a "Good Fellows Get Together" brand, or mooning over the quality of the moonlight, is not expressive of what I, at least, term sportsmanship. It consists rather of an inherent love for the open, an instinct for the essentials, a certain disregard for the artificialities of civilization, and those qualities of mind and body which allow one to adjust one's thoughts and actions to the laws of nature, and enables one to cope successfully and honestly with nature, and with man's opposing forces. And the normal indulgence of these instincts and desires is apt to mean a lifetime of clean thinking, clean living, and a full share of happiness.

CHAPTER XII

EQUIPMENT

SINCE barefoot days of boyhood, when my entire fishing equipment consisted of a battle-scarred cane pole, a few feet of dependable chalk line, and a half dozen Kirby hooks, I have sought for and taken the best fish that swim in fresh water: bass, trout, salmon, and muskallunge, but never during the capture of these good fish have I experienced the thrills, the exultation that have pervaded my being while striving against those tremendous fighters who take the bait of the surfman. A fresh-water fish may give a battle on light tackle which will tax the ability of the angler, but here the fisherman is always master of the situation, and if he knows his business the quarry is always under control. In the surf conditions are to a great extent reversed. At the end of the line may be a fighting demon of the deep which no linen ever twisted is strong enough to halt, and one can but grasp the straining rod and pray that his antagonist may turn before the thousand feet of line is exhausted.

The life of a salt-water fish is a battle from beginning to end. There are always the tides and the heaving billows, and a hundred natural enemies to contend against, and it is but natural that these fish of the "vasty deep" should develop greater strength and endurance than is given to their cousins of inland waters, whose days, for the most part, are spent in repose and quiet in some calm inland lake or village stream.

It is no unusual thing for a five-pound bluefish to strike the moving squid with such a ferocious rush that the tip of the stout two-handed rod is swept to the water, bending like a reed in a mighty blast, while no unprotected hand can withstand the rush of a striper or a channel bass if he be of fair weight. Thumb stalls, leather aprons, and patent drag handles come into play in surf fishing, but though I have been fortunate enough to take bass and trout of more than six pounds' weight, and muskallunge of six times this size, I have never found the need for any artificial adjunct to the bare thumb in any fresh-water angling that I have undertaken.

Here on the bank I have found all those things which the sportsman craves: the excitement of battling with noble fish, fresh winds and pearly days, the "tent of blue" above, and clean sand beneath, loneliness and solitude at times, which

is good for the soul, and romance. Yes, romance is there in every curling breaker, in the vast distances and in the roar and turmoil of thrashing waters, in the storm-born dunes that shift in the winter gales, and bury wrecks of mighty ships. Peace and quiet I have found, too, for what more analogous of absolute peace than the mightiest force in nature at rest.

My field of endeavour, since I have turned to the ocean for my recreation, has broadened, has, in fact, become limitless. My environments are as vast, as wild, and isolated as I care to make them. No grander or more inspiring expressions of nature are given to the eye of man to behold than those scenes in which my piscatorial endeavours occur. The fish which visit the surf vary in size and in character from dainty creatures a bare handspan in breadth and marked with rainbow tints that come from the clear water in which they disport themselves, to great leviathans of the ocean bed, no more to be compared to fresh-water fishes in size and strength than are those ancient tools of warfare which existed in the days of knight-errantry to be compared to the tremendous machinery of destruction which the Great War has evoked. And the tools of the craft with which I am wont to pursue these fellows —and this is a matter of prime importance to the

true sportsman—are beautiful in construction, and the methods we surfmen employ are scientific.

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To enjoy to the fullest the delights of surf fishing one must be properly equipped in the matter of tackle, for many an otherwise perfect day on the beach, during a run of fish, has been spoiled by unwise selection of equipment. No form of fishing requires more careful consideration, even to the minutest detail, for a faulty hook, an improperly tied knot, or a careless job of welding may bring about the loss of a record fish.

The average sporting goods dealer, while he may be qualified to choose an outfit for trout or bass fishing, is seldom experienced enough in the surf game properly to advise the beginner as to his requirements, and is apt to unload upon the buyer an outfit entirely inadequate for his purpose. There is no branch of fishing in which it is easier to throw money away needlessly.

Purchasing an outfit for surf fishing is a good bit the same proposition as investing in a time-piece. In the latter case a fairly efficient bit of mechanism may be procured for a few dollars, while an absolutely dependable watch, one in which the owner may take pride, and which will last through a generation, will cost fifty dollars or

more. Few surf fishermen start out with expensive outfits, and yet there are few who fail to end up by owning a standard equipment. For twenty dollars one can become the owner of a rod, reel, line, and accessories with which he will be able to cast sufficiently well to catch fish, and which may hold up for several years. For three times that amount may be purchased an outfit which will last for a dozen years or more, and with which he will do far better work from the beginning. Whether to start with an expensive outfit or to acquire it an article at a time will be determined by the weight of one's pocketbook.

In any case, whether the equipment cost twenty dollars or a hundred, each item in it must be of a particular pattern, and built expressly for the work at hand. I have seen more than one ill-advised novice come to the beach with an expensive rig the usefulness of which was completely discounted by the impracticability of one or two items.

The rod and the reel are of course the most important and the most costly articles of the outfit. Nine hundred feet of line may cost from three to six dollars, depending as much upon the place it is purchased as upon its quality. The adjuncts: hooks, leaders, swivels, weights, etc., at the end of the season may have meant considerable

outlay. Yet there are ways of cutting down one's expenditures for these smaller items, which I shall mention in the present chapter.

Each year there are developed new wrinkles in surf tackle and new methods of pursuing the sport. The systems of our fathers' time are now quite passé, and quite likely present-day ideas will be scorned by the next generation. Yet surf fishermen as a rule are more conservative, and are less inclined to experiment with new contraptions than are other classes of fishermen. This is a good thing, in a way, for otherwise they would load up with a collection of doodads and thinga magigs far more ornamental than useful, such as will be found in the tackle box of the bait caster, for instance. "Show me," says the surfman, and I believe he has the right idea.

The surf-fishing layout is far less elaborate than is used in other branches of scientific angling. A single rod, reel, and line, and in many cases a single size and style of hook may be used on a dozen trips. But it is advisable to have an assortment in the tackle bag if one wishes to be prepared for such festive occasions as the arrival of a school of bluefish, or the sighting of a shark's fin in the offing.

No makeshift outfit will do, that is certain. If you are a bank fisherman, or one who dangles his

rod from a public pier, do not expect to use any part of this bungling tackle in the surf. It will only mean unsatisfactory results from the first, and may cause you, because of your inability to get any distance into your cast, to damn a sport which if it had been properly approached would unquestionably have made of you a devotee.

As an example, I remember several years ago visiting a point of beach famous for its yields of channel bass and other surf fish. It was early morning when we arrived; the sun just appearing above a mass of cumulous vapour, and with a gentle west wind curling the breakers lazily upon the beach. We found four men already in the surf, a party which had come by water from Atlantic City the day before. A glum, dispirited, mosquito-bitten and generally unhappy aggregation of fishermen they were, too, for their total catch amounted to a half dozen croakers and flounders. While we prepared our tackle they assured us of the futility of our efforts, execrated surf fishing in general and this spot in particular, and expressed their determination to stick to offshore fishing henceforth.

Conditions appeared to be right, we knew that the fish were in, and so we were but little affected by the lugubrious reports of our new acquaintances, particularly when we viewed their

tackle, for there was not an outfit in the crowd that could have placed a bait a hundred feet from shore. Our expectations of a good catch were realized, for it proved to be a morning of rare sport. There was scarce five minutes during the day that one or another member of our party was not hung to a fish of some species.

Mosquitoes, green-headed flies, and past miseries were forgotten by the boat fishermen in their eagerness to enjoy the sport, and one member of the party came near to drowning in his eagerness to place a bait in the schools.

A year later I again met two of the one-time scoffers at this same spot. This time they were properly outfitted and were getting their full share of the sport.

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THE REEL

This is the most important part of the equipment. A man can tie a free-running reel upon a length of bamboo, fit it with line guides and a tip, and catch his share of fish. He will not cast as far as his neighbour who swings a Seger rod, nor will he get as much pleasure from his fishing, but the outfit may answer for the time being.

The cost of the reel will vary anywhere between eight dollars and eighty, but whatever the price, it

should be equipped with the free spool feature with a lever throw off or release. Because of the corroding action of salt water, German silver and rubber construction is preferable. For general surf fishing the 2-0 size, which holds in the neighbourhood of three hundred yards of nine-thread line, is the most popular, and is large enough for anything up to channel bass or stripers. Those who like to give a shark a run for his money prefer the 3-0. For around thirty dollars may be purchased a standard article from either the Vom Hofe or Meisselbach factories, which will do as good work as the most expensive models, and which will last as long or longer than those reels which are equipped with elaborate mechanism. Personally, I am not interested in all those intricate folde-rolls which are being built into reels of late. A simple free spool arrangement, with click, and possibly a plain drag, is all that is required in surf fishing. Either a thumb stall or a leather apron which may be attached to any reel at a cost of fifty cents will give all the resistance that the line can stand, and is always under the control of the fisherman. Too great dependence upon mechanical devices has a tendency to take the romance out of any sport. I know that I get more pleasure in the feel of the spool revolving beneath my thumb stall or apron, when a good fish hunts deep water,

than I do when fumbling for the left- or right-hand rim drag, or the drag pilot, as the case may be.

The strain on the reel while casting and when playing a good fish is tremendous, and the happy combination of perfect adjustment and strength is attained only through the use of the best materials by expert workmen. A loosened screw may cause the reel to disgorge its entire interior mechanism, or may stop the handle dead, which in either case would mean disaster if one were playing a large fish. It is advisable, then, not only to purchase a dependable reel in the first place, but also to give it the same attention and care that would be given to any other piece of fine mechanism. Frequent oiling is necessary, and it should be taken apart several times each season and cleaned with gasoline. If by any mischance the reel is allowed to drop on the sand it should be cleaned at once. A certain amount of sand is bound to work into the cog wheels and oil caps, and every time I take my reels apart, and consider the thousands of revolutions the spool has made, and the adverse conditions under which it has laboured, I marvel that its mechanism is not entirely disorganized.

The solid reel seat, which is now used on all the better class of reels, is a desirable feature, as it places a solid metal base at the point of greatest

strain. This innovation has done more to lengthen the life of the reel than any invention of recent years.

While any free-running, multiplying reel can be used in surf fishing, without the free spool device it is impossible to get any distance into one's cast, and the constant wear of the rapidly revolving handle will harm the action of this part of the equipment to a great degree.

THE ROD

Being made on standard lines, the reel is easily chosen, but with the rod it is a different and a more difficult matter. Here we have a hand-made article, constructed in a dozen or more shapes and sizes, and of a half dozen different materials. Scarcely any two rods are exactly alike, as no two pieces of wood or bamboo are of just the same grain and texture. We cannot all of us pick out the stick or cane from which our rod is to be manufactured, and so it remains for us to decide upon the material from which the rod is to be chosen, then go to some reputable dealer and make our purchase. The three most satisfactory materials used in the building of the surf rod are bamboo, greenheart, and lancewood. A split bamboo, if properly made up, is the most reliable of the three; stronger for its weight, and better in action after

the first season. It requires greater care, however, in the matter of varnish and rewinding, and is more easily affected by atmospheric conditions than are the best wood rods. With proper care, however, I believe that a bamboo stick will outwear even lancewood and greenheart. The cost of this rod will average about twenty-five per cent. more than either of the others. While I seem to get more pleasure in the use of the several bamboo rods, which are among my prized possessions, still I have off and on used for several seasons a Seger rod which was made fifteen years ago, and which is to-day in as good condition as when it left his hands. I have seen several good rods made of hickory, and one or two Bethabara sticks which proved serviceable, but on the whole, the latter wood is not to be relied upon.

No matter what material goes into its construction, the rod should be fitted with two pairs of large guides, and, if it can be procured, an offset or angle-casting tip. Agate guides and tip are preferable, of course, but hard to procure, and are being replaced by several compositions of which adamant seems to be the most serviceable. Whatever the material, both guides and casting tip should be of generous proportions.

The rod is of two-piece construction tip and butt. The tip upon which the guides are mounted is be-

tween six and seven feet in length, though I have one jumbo of a rod with a tip of eight feet four inches. With the butt, this rod is ten feet ten inches over all. It was built especially for use in heavy seas, and when using it I find myself able to ride the high rollers when it would be impossible to hold with a short rod. It is a bit awkward for ordinary use, though a surprisingly easy casting stick. The best length for a fisherman of average size and strength would be a six-foot six inch to a seven-foot tip, with a spring butt of twenty-eight or thirty inches. These spring butts are a recent development, and the last few years there has been a tendency to shave them more and more in the centre, giving them a springiness which is answerable for the name they go by. That a certain spring to the butt is advantageous in casting there is no doubt, but the main advantage derived from the extreme length is the added leverage, which gives a drive to the cast which could never be attained with the short butts in use a dozen years back. With this style of butt it is no unusual thing for a tournament caster to heave his weight to the unbelievable distance of four hundred feet and better. With the regular fishing rig and baited hook a cast of half this distance is more than sufficient, and farther by several feet than the average surfman will be able to throw his bait.

Some fishermen like an exceedingly stiff tip, others prefer one with a great deal of play. My own liking is for a rod with considerable whip, though it must never be shaved so far as to lessen the strength of the implement. The act of casting, particularly if one is fishing a heavy bait and weight, puts a tremendous strain on the tip. In fact, ten rods and lines are broken on the cast to one that gives way while playing a fish. Excepting for shark fishing, where an exceedingly heavy cast is used, a bamboo tip of twelve to fourteen ounces is all-sufficient, and I have seen a number of these mighty fellows taken on light surf outfits. A springy rod not only gives greater distance to the cast, but it makes the cast itself easier and more graceful. To see a really expert surfman with one movement swing back his rod and whip the bait far into the tide will cause the veriest tyro to long to do likewise. But to accomplish this feat it is necessary first of all to be properly outfitted.

A well-made rod with German silver mountings will cost anywhere between fifteen and thirty-five dollars. A perfectly satisfactory greenheart or lancewood rod should be obtained for eighteen to twenty dollars, a bamboo rod with the same mountings for twenty-five to thirty-five.

I have known beginners to use a rod for several seasons that cost no more than five or six dollars,

and to do very good work with it. There are three very good reasons, however, for shunning too cheap an article. None of these thrown together rods is fitted with either agate or adamant guides and tip, and under constant use the line—which in itself is an important and an expensive part of the equipment—will wear out quickly through friction with the bare metal. Also a cheap rod is apt to give way at any time under the play of a heavy fish, a trophy which may look better to the angler than a hundred-dollar-bill. Neither can one who uses a rod in which he reposes little confidence put any great power into his cast, and the result is an uncertain, halting heave which never attains any distance. When one is trying for big fish, confidence in the tackle is essential to success. When not in use the rod may be hung by the tip in a dry spot, but in not too close proximity to a stove or register. Several times each season it should be gone over carefully; loose strands of silk re-tied, and a coat of varnish applied if the finish is chipped. One or two coats of good quality rod varnish applied each fall, at the end of the fishing season, will add years to the life of any rod.

THE LINE

Next to the rod in importance comes the line. This is of twisted linen and nine to fifteen

thread in size. The last few years there has been a tendency to discard heavier lines in favour of the nine-thread twist. Excepting when I am fishing for sharks, with a 4-0 reel, my own dependence is placed in the nine thread, for my experience has been that if it is in good condition it will bear all the strain that the average fisherman will put upon it. Of course there is more danger of it snapping from backlashes, and it must be tested frequently. I favour the small line mainly because of the greater distance one can get into the cast with the same effort, and also because of the fact that a greater amount can be spooled on the regulation reel. In playing a big fish, every added foot of line means a greater advantage to the fisherman. After the day's fishing the line should be dried in a shady spot, and it is a good plan to wash it in fresh water before drying. If the line is tested several times each day, during the fishing, at the point where it is attached to the swivel, and if a few feet are cut off in case any weakness is apparent, many a rig will be saved. When the time comes that the line shows weakness for some distance above the rig, it may be reversed upon the reel. It is advisable to carry several extra spools of line in the tackle bag, as there is nothing more ruinous to the disposition of the surfman than to have a shark run off with his last foot of line just when

the fish are biting best. Several lines have been placed upon the market treated with a waterproof finish, which, while they do very well for boat fishing have a great tendency to snarl during the cast. The natural finish is far better.

A line drier costs but little, or it can be easily made at home, if one possess any mechanical ability, and is well worth the trouble or expense it entails. Stringing the line between pegs demands an amount of time and exercise the expenditure of which the fisherman does not particularly relish after a day on the beach.

HOOKS AND LEADERS

Too much care cannot be given to the selection of the hooks. Those tied by hand cost a bit more, but they are well worth the difference in price. The O'Shaughnessy and the Pennel patterns are most in use though the Sproath as its adherents. All three are of straight point construction—which means for strength—and all are well forged and strongly made. I believe that there is a great tendency among fisherman in general to use hooks of too large a size. The striking force necessary to drive the hook home below the barb is far greater than the average angler imagines, and I am convinced that most of those fish lost on the first dash are not fairly hooked, only pricked.

On tests made upon several large fish of different varieties I have found that a dead pull of from seven to fifteen pounds was required to bury a number 8-o hook, while a hook two sizes smaller was imbedded with a little more than half the strain. It is well to sharpen the points of the hooks with a small file or a carborundum stone before using, and, at the same time, slightly to reduce the barb on the inside of the bend. This does not lessen the strength of the hook, and greatly increases the chance of hooking firmly.

Three or four sizes are enough to carry on the average trip, with a couple of extra strength in case sharks are encountered: 7-o or 8-o for channel bass and stripers, 4-o or 5-o for such fish as weaks and flounders, and a few of number 1-o for kingfish and other small-mouthed fellows.

My large hooks I usually purchase with a brazed eye, and tie to piano wire. Salt-water fishes are not such suspicious feeders as trout and bass, and they mind the wire leader as little as they do the more transparent and more fragile gut. Shark, bluefish, and snapper hooks must always be fastened to wire, for the sharp teeth of these fishes make quick work of gut or linen. The small hooks, from 5-o down, unless they are used in fishing for blues, may be tied to at least two strands of gut.

In making-up the wire-snelled hooks I prefer rust-proof piano wire. I always carry in my tackle bag a few made-up wire leaders in three- and four-foot lengths, fitted with a swivel at either end. They are mighty convenient shark rigs, when two are connected to a three-way swivel.

The two-foot gut leaders generally used by surf fisherman are an expensive luxury and may well be replaced by a length of tarred line equal to eighteen-thread linen, or even by lengths of the latter line treated with varnish or other water-proofing. A loop tied at each end with a knot halfway down, in case the fisherman desires to use a second hook, makes of it an entirely serviceable, and in fact, a deal stronger rigging than the semi-transparent gut. I believe that most fishermen give to the denizens of the deep credit for a greater intelligence than they actually possess. Suspicious they may be, under certain conditions, but when one considers the amount of seaweed and other vegetable matter indigenous to the ocean, which is eternally washing about our lines and baits, it seems ridiculous to presume that the finny creatures will be suspicious of any object so unterrifying in appearance as a bit of neutral-coloured cord. Even when conditions arise which make it advisable to rig my line with a stiff wire leader and wire-snelled hooks, I find that my chances

with even the most timid of salt-water fishes is in no way imperilled.

THE RIG

The rig or cast which is generally considered the most satisfactory and the least troublesome for all-round fishing, consists of a cross-line swivel to one ring of which is attached the leader and hook, the weight to a second ring, and the line to a third. There are several variations to the cross line, and a half dozen unique and more or less practicable devices which are intended to replace it, but nothing simpler, stronger, or better for all-round work has yet been invented. The Allright cross line is more intricate in design and weaker in construction. It is supposed to eliminate the tangling of line and leader, but it scarcely lives up to its advertised reputation.

What is known as "the channel bass rig" is being used by a great many surfmen, particularly when in pursuit of these delicate biters. The rig consists simply of a ring, to which the sinker is attached. The line is run through the ring, and kept at its proper distance by a small strip of rawhide, or whang leather, which is doubled through the ring on the wire snell, and the line fastened through two small holes punched in the leather. The claim made for this rig is that as the line runs freely

through the ring, the bait will hang free of the weight of the sinker, and light-biting fish will thus be hooked more easily. Were there no movement upon the bed of the ocean, where our bait reposes, this rig might do all that is claimed for it, but in actual practice we find that the baited hook is on the move almost incessantly as the tide washes it back and forth and not infrequently it becomes twisted around the line or sinker. When there is floating seaweed and kelp in the water, the channel bass rig is a positive nuisance, as the action of the waves during the play of a fish has a tendency to force the loosely hung weight a considerable distance above the hook, where it is apt to become fouled with the weed. Since losing two good bass in this manner I have tabooed this rig excepting when conditions are just right for its use.

Pyramid sinkers of several sizes should be carried in the bag for use in different conditions of surf. The four-ounce size is generally employed, but in a very quiet sea the three-ounce weight is sufficient. When the surf is heavy or there is a strong cut or side current, a five- or even a six-ounce weight may save the day. A modification of the umbrella or stabler sinker, which has a three-cornered head and a long shank, is one of the best holding weights I have ever used, but for some reason or other

few dealers handle them. They are best purchased in the five and a half ounce size, and are equal in resistance to a pyramid weight of seven ounces.

Metal squids have been described in a previous chapter. Several of these, of three and four inch, should be carried in the tackle bag at all times, for none can tell when a school of bluefish is apt to break in.

When the line breaks, either when playing a fish or on the cast, it parts nine times in ten at the point where the line is knotted to the swivel. This weakening of the tackle can be greatly lessened by tying a four-foot loop with a bowline knot, doubling the loop through the ring of the swivel. Another favourite stunt among old surf fishermen is to insert a split ring through one ring of the swivel, and to this split ring attach a small strip of rawhide, which has had a hole punched in either end. The line is doubled through the rawhide, and fastened. Used in conjunction, this makes the safest fastening for the rig that has yet been applied.

ADJUNCTS

The articles I have mentioned comprise the essentials of the surf fisherman's outfit, yet there are several items, which, though they are not

necessary to success, add greatly to the comfort of the angler and increase his pleasure in this alluring sport to a considerable degree. Chief of these perhaps is the rod belt, or butt rest. They are made in several patterns, the most satisfactory of which consists of a flat piece of leather, with a sole leather cup in which the butt of the rod reposes. For a short-armed fisherman, whose rod is equipped with a spring butt, the adjustable style which hangs below the belt may be found more satisfactory.

The crescent bait box should be of generous proportions, and is best constructed of aluminum or German silver. Its place may be taken by a canvas bag, or one made of some water-proof material. When large baits are in use the bag will be found more convenient, as it can be made to hold a much larger supply. I know of few things which are more apt to bring forth a flow of strong language than to find oneself short of bait and a half mile from the base of supplies just when the fish are biting best.

The sand spike is affected by most dyed-in-the wool surfmen, though they are a weighty and bunglesome article to tote on a long hike. A design, lighter and more compact in construction, would unquestionably be a boon to surf fishermen. Of course none but the most careless tyro would be

guilty of allowing his rod and reel to come in contact with the sand, and to stand the rod upright, without the use of a sand spike, is a difficult matter. When not in use it is a good practice to wrap the towel—which is a part of the equipment—around the reel. This prevents the wind-blown sand from sifting into the mechanism.

The towel, which hangs at the front or side of the belt, is used for the purpose of cleaning the hands after rebaiting, and in cold weather, after making the cast.

A stout knife for the cutting up of bait, cleaning fish, removing gorged hooks, etc., is a necessity. Any broad-bladed butcher's knife will answer the purpose, though a heavy sheath knife with a saw-toothed back is the handiest pattern.

Besides the foregoing articles my tackle bag always contains a small screw driver for use in making possible repairs to the reel; a small file or carborundum stone for sharpening hooks; a small pair of pincers; a can of oil, and a spool of heavy thread for tieing on bait.

No better receptacle for this collection of odds and ends of tackle can be found than a canvas game bag twelve or fifteen inches in depth. They are made in several styles, and usually with two or more compartments. A willow basket or a trout creel will take its place very handily. The

hooks and leaders repose nicely in a canvas tackle book, which may be purchased with four or more folders. A metal tackle box is an abomination.

The apparel of the surfman varies with the seasons. Hip boots are essential during early summer and fall, but many fishermen discard them during the months of mid-summer. With the coming of torrid July or August days one may go as far as his natural modesty or social laws will allow, and I have spent many a perfect day on the beach garbed only in a bathing suit and a smile of anticipation. Unless one is inured to the sun, however, this practice may induce painful results. A pair of canvas shoes give ample protection to the feet in warm weather, and they are easily dried. In the chapter on Beach Camping there will be found more complete suggestions in regard to the matter of clothing.

HANDLING THE ROD

It is impossible, by written words, to instruct the novice in the use of his rod any more than one could learn the "light fantastic" through the same channel, but it is possible to advance suggestions which may prevent him from acquiring certain habits which might be overcome only with difficulty. To one who has used the free-running reel in casting for bass or other fresh-water fishes, the

handling of the surf outfit will come quickly and easily, and yet there are radical differences. Instead of a four- or five-foot rod, we have here an implement approximately twice that length, and instead of using one hand, both are now required. The right hand graps the rod just below the reel, and attends to the thumbing, while the left hand is extended to the extreme end of the butt. The cast is made overhead, and slightly to the right, with a full swing of the shoulders and body, though with no undue contortions. A decided whip or snap of the rod—which is brought about by drawing the left hand sharply downward—adds considerable impetus to the cast by bringing the spring of the rod into play. The course of the bait is followed by the tip, and the reel stopped when the bait reaches its desired resting place. The thumb is kept firmly in contact with the spool at the beginning of the cast, the pressure gradually growing less as the momentum of the line decreases, until in some cases the thumb may be entirely removed. It is much harder, of course, to cast against the wind than when it is blowing offshore, and with the wind in one's face it is necessary to thumb the reel much more firmly.

The method of casting in which the angler swings his rod sideways, much as though he were handling a baseball bat, is quite obsolete, and a

sideswiper is about as popular on the beach as a bull at a Sunday-school picnic. The man who is so unfortunate as to receive a four-ounce pyramid sinker behind the ear is apt to imagine himself back in Flanders, that is, if he remains in a condition to do any thinking.

It is difficult to make a full cast with the linen line while it is in a dry state with a complete surf rigging and the common practice is to make a couple of short preliminary throws, enough thoroughly to dampen several hundred feet of the line.

When a touch or bite is felt, the actions of the fisherman will depend a good bit upon the species of fish which is at his bait, and with practice one can come pretty close to determining this question. Three times in four the old surfman can call his fish before it is fairly hooked. Of the larger fish, the striped bass, the bluefish, the shark, and weakfish are quick, hard biters, ordinarily, and it is safe to lay back on the rod the instant the strike is felt. Channel bass, black drum, and many of the small specimens are more hesitating in their mouthing of the bait, and require more time, before the hook is set. There has been much argument among surf fishermen concerning the advisability of striking the fish, not a few believing that the weight of the captive against a taut line is sufficient to bury the barb. This I believe de-

pends upon the variety. With most fish I find it to be advisable to give a firm backward heave the instant the weight of the fish is felt. If the quarry runs shoreward on taking the bait, a couple of quick rearward steps are perfectly proper in order to take up the slack from the line. This is the only occasion, however, when a crawfishing movement is considered in good form. Most of us who infest the beach during the fishing season are acquainted with the type of angler—so called—who immediately upon hooking his fish scrambles backward for a hundred feet or more, working his reel with spasmodic haste, and dragging his catch by main strength from its native element. Most of us, too, have been highly elated, now and then, by the spectacle of these same fishermen tumbling head over heels as their feet came in contact with some obstruction. All fish should be played from one position, of course, and handled with the rod and reel alone, unless the movements of the fish carry the angler either up or down the beach.

Pumping is practised less in beach fishing than when angling from a boat, though the action is of service not only in landing the quarry but in halting a rush. When one finds his line becoming scarce on the reel, or when the hooked fish runs dangerously close to a jetty or other object protrud-

ing into the ocean it is often possible to cause the fish to turn, by bringing the rod smartly backward in what is really more of a jerk than a pump. This stunt is not always successful by any means, but it has saved many a fish that would otherwise have made good his escape.

The beaching of a fish is no small part of the fine art of surf fishing, and many a good specimen has been lost in the undertow after being fought to a finish. In a moderate surf it is no great trick to beach a fish, but in a heavy sea it is sometimes a difficult matter. Generally the experienced angler brings his quarry close in, then holds steady until a fair-sized roller approaches, which will do the rest. It is unsafe, of course, to attempt to bring the fish to the beach until he is well played out, and when he is once in the undertow he should be kept coming head on. When the receding wave leaves the fish high and—comparatively—dry a couple of fingers inserted in the gills will drag him to safety. That needle-toothed, snapping fellow, the bluefish, must be handled with caution, and of course a shark must be approached from the southern extremity.

The preservation of one's catch is often a serious problem, and at times a well-nigh-impossible undertaking. Nor do instructions in this matter, as contained in various volumes on woodcraft, help

us greatly, for they all include the laying or hanging of the fish in the cool shade of trees or other sheltering objects. Trees and shade are two things that the beach shows an exceeding dearth of, and two things which one can with difficulty transport in a pack bag. There is but one place on the beach to find coolness and protection from the sun, and that is beneath the level of the sand. An excavation to the depth of several feet, and lined with seaweed, forms a cool and comfortable retreat for our finny beauties, which will preserve them in good condition for twenty-four hours or more, depending upon the species. Of course it is a good plan to remove the viscera and wipe the catch clean, paying particular attention to the vicinity of the backbone.

If the fish are to be kept for any considerable length of time the only method of preservation, unless one has ice at his disposal, is by the salting process. In this case the fish are split open for their entire length, the head, and in some cases the backbone, removed with the entrails. They may then be packed in a wooden keg or bucket flesh side up, and each layer of fish covered with a generous handful of salt. At the end of a few hours they will be found immersed in a heavy brine of their own making, and if properly cleaned beforehand, they will keep almost indefinitely. I

have also had good success in smoking such fish as weaks, croakers and whiting, first salting them overnight. In this process they are hung above a barrel or other receptacle in such a position that they will receive the full benefit from a smoke fire burning beneath, but at such a distance as to escape the heat from the flames.

Of course these ocean fish are much more attractive, both to the eye and to the palate, if they are preserved in a natural state. Many of them are really beautiful in shape and colouring.

Many times I have seen the beach strewn with specimens of the finest game and food fish that the ocean produces. Fine fat fellows left to rot by thoughtless fishermen who had captured more than they could carry away, or more than their immediate needs required. This practice is to be deplored. No man who deserves the name of sportsman will kill fish or game in greater quantities than can be used or retained for future use.